

The Lordship of the Isles

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The Lordship of the Isles

Edited by

Richard D. Oram



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Cover illustration: Castle Tioram on the tidal island Eilean Tioram in Loch Moidart, Lochaber, Scotland.
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List of Abbreviations

Aberdeen Registrum	Registrum Episcopus Aberdonensis
ACon	Annals of Connacht
ADCP	Acts of the Lords of Council in Public Affairs, 1501–1554
AFM	Annals of the Four Masters
AI	Annals of Innisfallen
ALC	Annals of Loch Cé
ALI	Acts of the Lords of the Isles 1336–1493
APS	Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland
AU	Annals of Ulster
Boece, Historia	Hector Boece, Scotorum Historiae a prima gentis origine
CDS	Calendar of Documents Relating to Scotland Preserved in Her Majesty's Public Record Office
Chron Bower	Walter Bower, Scotichronicon
Chron Fordun	Johannis de Fordun, Chronica Gentis Scotorum
Chron Frasers	Chronicles of the Frasers
Chron Holyrood	Chronicle of Holyrood
Chron Lanercost	Chronicon de Lanercost
Chron Man	Cronica Regum Mannie et Insularum: the Chronicle of the Kings of Man and the Isles
Chron Wyntoun	Andrew of Wyntoun, Orygynale Cronykil of Scotland
CPL	Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland: Papal Letters
CPL Benedict XIII	Calendar of Papal Letters to Scotland to Benedict XIII of Avignon, 1394–1419.
CPL Clement VII	Calendar of Papal Letters to Scotland of Clement VII of Avignon, 1378–1394
CPR	Calendar of Patent Rolls
CSP Ireland	Calendar of the State Papers relating to Ireland of the Reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary and Elizabeth, 1509–1603
CSSR	Calendar of Scottish Supplications to Rome
EHR	English Historical review
ER	The Exchequer Rolls of Scotland
Foedera	Foedera Conventiones et Cujuscunque Generis Acta Publica
Fraser, Grant	Fraser, W (ed) The Chiefs of Grant
Fraser, Sutherland	Fraser, W (ed), The Sutherland Book

Hamilton Papers	The Hamilton Papers. Letters and Papers illustrating the political relations of England and Scotland in the sixteenth century, formerly in the possession of the Dukes of Hamilton now in the British Museum
HMC	Historical Manuscripts Commission
HP	Highland Papers
Inchaffray Chrs	Charters Bulls and Other Documents relating to the Abbey of Inchaffray
L&P Henry VIII	Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of Henry VIII
MacFarlane, Genealogical	Genealogical Collections Concerning Families in Scotland, Made by Walter MacFarlane, 1750–1751
MacFarlane, Geographical	Geographical Collections relating to Scotland made by Walter Macfarlane
Major, History	John Major, A History of Greater Britain as well England as Scotland
MCB	Mac Carthaigh's Book
Moray Registrum	Registrum Episcopatus Moraviensis
Paisley Registrum	Registrum Monasterii de Passelet
PPC	Proceedings of the Privy Council
RMS	Registrum Magni Sigilii Regum Scotorum
Rotuli Scotiae	Rotuli Scotiae in Turri Londiniensi et in Domo Capitulari Westmonasteriensi Asservati
RPC	The Register of the Privy Council of Scotland
RPS	Records of the Parliaments of Scotland
RRS	Regesta Regum Scottorum
RSCHS	Records of the Scottish Church History Society
RSS	Registrum Secreti Sigilli Regum Scotorum
SHR	Scottish Historical Review
SP Henry VIII	State Papers of King Henry VIII
Stevenson, Documents	Documents Illustrative of the History of Scotland from the Death of King Alexander the Third to the Accession of Robert Bruce, ed J Stevenson, 2 volumes (Edinburgh, 1870)
TA	Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland
Theiner (ed), Vet Mon	Vetera Monumenta Hibernorum et Scotorum Historiam Illustrantia, ed A Theiner, (Rome, 1864)

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Introduction

A Celtic Dirk at Scotland's Back? The Lordship of the Isles in Mainstream Scottish Historiography since 1828

Richard D. Oram

This volume of essays has its origin in a chance conversation in 1993 in which it emerged that no event had been organised to mark the five hundredth anniversary of the forfeiture of the Lordship of the Isles by King James IV of Scotland. The result was a small academic conference the following year based at Ballygrant on Islay, close to the former symbolic centre of the Lordship at Finlaggan, and plans to bring the papers from that conference together as a published collection. That plan never matured and the conference papers which represented the contribution of different disciplines to the study of the MacDonald Lordship mainly found homes in academic journals or were incorporated into larger research publications. Individually, none came close to offering the chronological depth or disciplinary breadth that the multi-author collection had promised and, while in the last two decades there has been a renaissance of research into the Late Medieval period in the Western Highlands and Islands of Scotland – focussed especially on the Church – a comprehensive modern overview of the MacDonald lordship in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries has remained a conspicuous absentee on the publications horizon.

The essays in this volume, amongst which are two substantially revised and developed papers from that original 1994 conference, are not claimed to constitute such a comprehensive overview; they focus on key themes that illustrate the culture(s) and identity/ identities of the territories encompassed by the MacDonald Lordship at its peak, from portable personal artefacts to ships, buildings and the visual signifiers of heraldry; episodes critical in the development, downfall and disintegration of the MacDonalds' imperium; and institutions that gave form and substance to MacDonald power. None are 'traditional', indeed some might be regarded as iconoclastic in the challenges that they present to conventional understanding of issues such as the MacDonalds' relations with the Bruce family in Scotland and the Lancastrian kings in England, or the feudal/military lens through which castle-building and the projection of lordship in the West Highlands and Islands have long been viewed. By breaking through the constraining framework of prejudices and preconceptions that are the legacy of nineteenth-century historiography, these essays offer a new set of perspectives on the complex of land, sea, people, material expressions

and mental imaginings that together constituted the political embodiment of the medieval Scottish Gaidhealtachd.

But what was that embodiment of the medieval Scottish Gaidhealtachd? There is perhaps a tendency to view it as territorially monolithic, a single entity that spanned the whole of the Hebrides and much of the West Highland mainland, united under a sole ruler and sharing common linguistic and material cultural norms. A key aim in assembling this collection of essays has been to take a fresh look at that vision of unitary identity free from the expressions of 'manifest destiny' that coloured much nineteenth-century writing that revolved around Clan Donald and the claims voiced on its behalf by generations of Gaelic sennachaidhs and clan historians to a role as rightful leaders of the Gael. These claims 'established' the MacDonalds' descent extending back to the apical figure of Somerled/Somairle, and then founded on a concocted royal pedigree equal to that of the kings of Scots from him to the ninth-century Irish warrior Gofraidh, son of Fergus, who was described anachronistically in the seventeenth-century *Annals of the Four Masters* as 'chief of the Innsi Gall' at the time of his death.¹ In re-evaluating that traditional vision, many of the contributors have confronted a series of the pillars upon which several of the established perceptions of the MacDonalds' place within the wider frame of Scottish history have been constructed. Questioning the teleological determinism and Whiggish perspectives of much nineteenth- and earlier twentieth-century historiography, they have raised challenging questions over the traditional projection of the Lordship as a 'state-within-a-state' competing with Lowland Scotland's anglophone political community for primacy, threatening both the territorial integrity and independent existence of the kingdom, and whose rulers' prestige and power rivalled the authority of the kings of Scots. Beyond this political historical recontextualisation, however, these studies have also explored aspects of the social and cultural behaviour of the MacDonalds, questioning the traditional presentation of the relationship with the east and south of the mainland in terms of socio-cultural polar opposites and revealing instead the interconnectedness and hybridity of what has long been depicted as distinct blocs. Sharp cleavages there certainly were between the predominantly Gaelic- and predominantly English-speaking districts, but there were equally sharp distinctions within those blocs and areas where cultural interfaces were blurred.

1 <http://www.ucc.ie/celt/online/T100005A/> annal M851 16. For discussion of this fictive heritage see A. Woolf, 'The origins and ancestry of Somerled: Gofraid mac Fergus and "the Annals of the Four Masters"', *Medieval Scandinavia*, 15 (2005), 199–213.

Regardless of the antiquity-forging (in every sense of that term) intentions of generations of Clan Donald poets, genealogists and the more recent scholars who have accepted their claims, there remains one inescapable fact: for nearly two centuries, the Western Highlands and Islands of Scotland were dominated by one family, the MacDonalds of Islay. Descended from the great twelfth-century warlord Somerled/Somairle, they had long contended with their kinsmen the MacDougalls and the MacRuairis for the headship of their extended kin-network and the lordship of the Hebrides and Argyll which that brought. Long overshadowed by both of those rival families, it was in the turmoil of the Wars of Independence that the MacDonalds found the opportunity to achieve superiority and in the political upheavals of fourteenth-century Scotland were given the circumstances to consolidate their position of dominance and create an enduring territorial lordship in the West. Whilst they could trace their ancestry to the mid-1100s, in most of the surviving early post-medieval MacDonald family histories celebrating and emphasising that lineage at least as much stress was placed on the significance of John MacDonald, the head of the kin for most of the fourteenth century, who moved his family from the margins into the political mainstream of the kingdom. For more modern writers John held an added significance; it was in his Latin charters that the title *dominus Insularum* (Lord of the Isles) appears first to have been deployed, resulting in his labelling as 1st Lord of the Isles. Although the totemic status of this Latin title is now played down in most scholarly analysis, which points instead to its origin simply in the translation of the Gaelic style *ri Innse Gall* (King of the Islands of the Strangers) used of Hebridean rulers from the eleventh century,² it has remained a convenient device for justifying the arbitrary dividing-line between the twelfth- and thirteenth-century Kingdom of the Isles and a fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Lordship. Artificial though the division is, it has been adopted in this volume as the chronological frame within which the focus of the contributing scholars has fallen.

The Lordship of the Isles: to academic and non-academic audiences alike the name is laden equally with historical and romantic associations that are the products of the complex and often contradictory constructions of Scottish identity-making that appeared in literary and antiquarian circles in the early nineteenth century. As a modern historiographical tradition evolved, that mix of romance and history has elicited often extreme responses amongst historians, most writing with a Lowland Scottish perspective that was distinctly antipathetic to Highland and Hebridean culture yet at the same time was curiously attracted to the 'otherness' to their own cultural experience that it represented.

2 *ALI*, xix–xx.

For some the Lordship was a warning from history, an exemplar of everything that was wrong with alternatives to mainstream anglophone Scottish/British culture, and to be held up as a mirror to the positive achievements of that with which it collided and against which it ultimately failed. Alternative evocations of the shattering ruination of a once-united and stable Highlands and Islands at the close of the fifteenth century in the aftermath of the Lowland government's dismemberment of the Lordship may be a distortion of historical realities, but proponents of this vision were surely right to emphasise the 'importance and [...] potentialities' of simply the idea of 'the last principality of Gaelic Alba'. For them the appeal of the Lordship was as much in its 'might have beens' as in the very real achievements in the arts, music and literature that were fostered by its existence.³ But their celebration of the Lordship's unique contribution to the diversity and richness of medieval Scotland highlighted just that sense of difference and detachment that their opponents viewed as dangerous and threatening to the project that was the making of the medieval Scottish kingdom. The result has been an historiography of immense complexity and often extreme polarity, where the conflicts of five centuries past have been refought with venom and vitriol surpassing the bitterness of the original struggles, and where even attempted objectivity could be construed as a carefully contrived slight. This present study seeks to navigate a course through these paper conflicts to explore the diverse historiographical strands and examine their collective contributions to the formation of current academic views on the place of the Lordship of the Isles within the context of medieval Scotland.

This overview of the modern historiography of the Lordship of the Isles takes as its starting-point Patrick Fraser Tytler's *History of Scotland*, published in stages from 1828 to 1843.⁴ Tytler's method, which was grounded in his training as a lawyer, saw the exposure of his historical sources to rigorous and sceptical analysis, and saw the completion of an intellectual shift that had begun in the mid eighteenth century from an historiographical tradition where interpretation was based on modern assumptions coloured by the authors' personal prejudices to one where interpretation was instead founded on the evidence of contemporary witnesses. Although still deeply coloured by Tytler's own political Toryism, his exploration of the triumph of Scotland's laws and legal institutions despite the descent into social violence, foreign and civil warfare accompanied by a collapse in the authority of central government, became established as the foundation upon which most later-nineteenth-century

3 I.F. Grant, *Lordship of the Isles: Wanderings in the Lost Lordship* (Edinburgh, 1935) 7.

4 P.F. Tytler, *History of Scotland*, 9 volumes (Edinburgh, 1828–43).

Scottish academic writing on history was raised.⁵ Tytler fixed a series of key themes as the central and defining characteristics within Scotland's historical experience into his narrative, cementing them into place as veritable articles of faith in the historical canon that was developed from his work. Many of these themes arose from post-Union Scottish legal-philosophical perspectives on the constitution, most notably his strongly Tory views on what constituted good and strong government, on the cultural rectitude of Lowland values, and on the conflicts between private ambition and public responsibility – often expressed in terms of unjust means of achieving just ends – all given sharper relief by the unconscious reflex of his own cultural prejudices. Further nuance was added by his conviction that there had existed an impulse in pre-Union Scotland towards the kinds of liberty represented by the modern British constitution, but that that impulse had been thwarted by the disorder that had flowed from English attempts to conquer Scotland and Scottish resistance to those attempts.

Several of these strands combined in Tytler's treatment of the place of the Lordship within the medieval kingdom. In his reading of the late medieval chronicle discussion of a distinction between Highland and Lowland cultures, such as that which had been brought to recent scholarly attention through Walter Goodall's 1769 edition of the narrative attributed to John of Fordun,⁶ and from parliamentary records of legislation directed against certain manifestations of Highlanders' social behaviour, he saw the historical roots of the Highland-Lowland antagonism that had been brought to its bloody climax almost within living memory at the battle of Culloden and in its aftermath. From this perception of ancient enmity between opposed cultures he constructed the first detailed 'modern' treatment of the notion of a racial division in medieval Scotland between Gaels and Saxons/Teutons or Highlanders and Lowlanders.⁷ Despite his extended analysis of what he perceived to be the racial or cultural composition of the kingdom there was little in his historical narrative that threw any light on the emergence of the political institutions of the Highlands and Islands, and the Lordship rather falteringly emerged as a topic in his discussion of David II's reign.⁸ From the outset, his discussion was constructed to support his gradualist view of the development of liberty under the British constitution, a regime which afforded the greatest degree of

5 M. Ash, *The Strange Death of Scottish History* (Edinburgh, 1980), 22–26.

6 *Joannis de Fordun Scotichronicon cum Supplementis et Continuatione Walteri Boweri*, ed W. Goodall (Edinburgh, 1769).

7 Tytler, *History of Scotland*, ii (Edinburgh, 1829), Section II.

8 *Ibid.*, 159, 169, 180, 182, 184, 189.

personal freedom to its citizens and under which the liberty of the state was a direct reflection of the morals of its people. The Lordship provided him with a perfect model to explore that linkage between degrees of liberty and good government and the moral qualities of the people: it is clear from Tytler's language that he regarded the Gaelic constituent of the medieval realm as inferior in that regard to the Lowland one, and that it thus posed a dangerous threat to the vision of a stable, united realm that was being advanced by the progressive, Lowlands-based monarchy.

Volume three of Tytler's work saw the political and cultural threat that the Lordship posed to Lowland Scotland and royal government explored in detail, commencing with discussion of the events surrounding the battle of Harlaw in 1411.⁹ Setting the tone that coloured most subsequent analyses of early Stewart Scotland until the 1990s, Tytler depicted Harlaw as an outcome of the chronic failure of royal government which he saw as characterising the period 1371 to 1424. In this he followed the presentation of that period as illustrated by 'Fordun' and his fifteenth-century continuator, Walter Bower, as a time of disorder, where the strong preyed on the weak and where violence was deployed casually as a political instrument. A straightforward reading of both the contemporary parliamentary record and the narrative chronicle accounts appeared to support his perception; descriptions of violent disorder, failures to exercise justice, moral decadence and corruption, and of the debilitating internecine feuding and political machinations of the kingdom's social leadership abound.¹⁰ Tytler saw all of these elements coming together in a dispute over possession of the earldom of Ross which triggered the military collision at Harlaw. In that dispute, Donald of the Isles resorted to military aggression to secure possession and, in Tytler's eyes, underscore his superiority of right and power through carrying destruction into the heartland of the Scottish political establishment. It was, however, not just a policy of mindless violence, for Tytler used newly accessible documentary records to discuss Donald's diplomatic dealings with the English crown, and the threat which an alliance between him and Henry IV of England posed for the Scots.¹¹ Here, then, his views on both the disruptive impact of English efforts to impose their overlordship on Scotland and on the moral weakness of the Gael were combined to powerful effect.

Whilst Tytler's analysis succeeded in maintaining a balanced view of the justice of Donald's claims but the injustice of his actions, there emerged in it a

9 Tytler, *History of Scotland*, iii, 170–178, 249–258, 276–279.

10 See, for *Ibid*, 5–6, 63–6, 69–79, 83–6, 118–124, 143.5.

11 Tytler, *History of Scotland*, iii, 171.

clearly-stated belief in an 'old and deep-rooted hostility between the Celtic and Saxon race'.¹² The size, ferocity and exoticism of Donald's army featured prominently in his discussion set in contrast to the cultural normality and numerical inferiority of the Lowlanders who mustered to march against him. A subtle manifestation of these themes had been present since the sixteenth century in Lowland historiography but from Tytler onwards description of the contrasts shifted from supposed cultural polar opposites to one which presented that opposition in terms of mutually visceral hatred arising from race or ethnicity. A sense of cultural 'otherness' and of the threat posed by the Highlanders to settled Lowland society continued through much of the rest of Tytler's discussion,¹³ but the place of the Lordship within his grand narrative of Scottish historical, political and constitutional development remains marginal until the actions of its rulers impinged upon the political life of the kingdom more generally.

It is in respect of John 4th Lord that Tytler's focus fixed on the Lordship, commencing with John's involvement with the Earls of Douglas in the period 1452–5, but becoming most expansive in the context of the treaty negotiated in 1462 by John and his kinsman, Donald Balloch, with Edward IV of England, and its aftermath in 1475–6.¹⁴ Throughout, the chief protagonist in these events is John, that 'fierce and insurgent noble', who is presented as the principal disturber of Highland Scotland and a notoriously recalcitrant rebel. In his account of the end of John's rule in 1493, Tytler constructed the narrative that became generally accepted through subsequent historical analyses for the next century: the young James IV recognising that the tyrannical regime of the Highland chiefs formed the greatest obstacle to the introduction of good government to the region determined to impose royal authority over them and curb their powers.¹⁵ In what followed, John became the architect of his own downfall, having 'the folly to defy the royal vengeance' and 'this formidable rebel' was rewarded with the consequent loss of his lands and possessions. It is, in essence, a moral tale that Tytler presents, of ambition, arrogance and ingratitude rewarded by justly-deserved total and irrecoverable loss of titles, lands and, more tragically, family, but it is coloured throughout by the implication that John's – and his predecessors' – actions were characteristic of the culture from which they sprang. For the good of the whole realm on its progress

12 Ibid, 174.

13 See, for example, his discussion in volume iv (Edinburgh, 1831), 26–27, 125–128, 367–370.

14 Ibid, 193–194, 245–246.

15 Ibid, 367–370.

towards constitutional perfection as a partner in the modern British state, but particularly for the poor unfortunates who languished under MacDonald misrule, the Lordship had to go.

Tytler brought down the curtain on the Lordship of the Isles with the forfeiture of 1493, offering no discussion of the consequences of the king's actions and how actual government was exercised in the absence of the central figure of the Lord. Those were themes dealt with in depth for the first time by Donald Gregory, Secretary of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, whose 1836 *History of the Western Highlands* tackled the turbulent era of political reconstruction in the region from 1493 to 1625.¹⁶ To provide context for the post-1493 position, Gregory constructed an historical narrative for the period 80–1493, the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century sections of which were based heavily on Tytler but with significant input of ideas from Gregory's friends, colleagues and fellow-Antiquarians Cosmo Innes and William F Skene. Gregory, as a member also of the Iona Club and Ossianic Society of Glasgow, and as his close friendship with William Skene would suggest, was altogether more Celtophilic than Tytler. As a consequence, his work lacks much of the cultural prejudice that pervaded Tytler's *History* and provides a more nuanced view of the place of the medieval Gaidhealtachd within Scotland. One particularly significant departure from Tytler's standpoint was Gregory's emphasis on the place of the MacDonalds vis à vis Scottish magnate politics and the integration of West Highland lords into the Scottish political community. His discussion of the rise of the MacDonald Lordship from the time of Angus Óg into the career of his son, John 1st Lord, revolves around the close personal relationship of the former with King Robert I and the collapse of that relationship through the latter's (non-)relationship with David II and frequent collisions with magnate rivals.¹⁷ There is, too, an emphasis on John's rebelliousness as being a response to Scottish royal policies rather than it being simply an expression of his ambitions for independence; his intrigues with England, however, were in Gregory's eyes still unequivocally treasonable.¹⁸ Government failures to deal justly with the grievances of John's son and grandson, the weakness and partisanship of the rule of the Albany Stewarts, and their failure to manage the often conflicting demands of the MacDonalds and their kinsmen added to the estrangement of the Lords of the Isles from the Scottish political community.

16 D. Gregory, *The History of the Western Highlands and Isles of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1836).

17 Gregory, *Western Highlands*, 2nd edition, 25–27. For a reappraisal of the MacDonald/Bruce relationship, see Penman, this volume.

18 Ibid, 28, 32.

For Gregory, the proof of this view of Highland disturbance arising from Lowland government mismanagement was to be seen in Alexander 3rd Lord's later good relationship with James I, his loyalty arising from due appreciation of 'the lenity shown to him by a prince celebrated for the unbending rigour of his government'.¹⁹ The departure from this more positive view of MacDonald/Stewart relations comes with John, 4th Lord, but even here his political machinations were interpreted by Gregory in the wider context of crown-magnate relations in mid-fifteenth-century Scotland, with John being enmeshed with and obliged to his political associates the Douglasses. In that regard, Gregory had no dispute with Tytler's view that John was the architect of his own downfall in 1475/6, but he is altogether more ambivalent with respect to post-1476 events. Rather than continuing to be the schemer and active disturber of the peace that Tytler presented him as, Gregory saw John as a passive bystander in events driven by more aggressive members of his family.²⁰ Indeed, in his final judgement of John in the context of the 1493 forfeiture, Gregory for the first time floated the suggestion that perhaps his 'chief crime' was his 'inability to keep the wild tribes of the West Highlands and Islands in proper subjection' rather than his rebelliousness.²¹ Disregarding the dubiousness of any claim that all that was needed to keep the region in check was firm government, this otherwise was a perceptive observation but it was over a century before it won more widespread acceptance as a factor behind James IV's suppression of the Lordship.

The significance of Gregory's *History* lay in its use of primary historical records to provide its supporting evidence rather than resorting to the mainly late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century clan histories upon which most earlier discussions had been based. In this approach he followed Tytler and, as a consequence, his work has had enduring significance as the first modern historical analysis of the MacDonalds. It meant, too, that his work was heavily mined by the writers of a host of later nineteenth-century clan histories, typified by Alexander Mackenzie's 1881 *History of the MacDonalds and Lords of the Isles*.²² Narrative in format and hugely derivative of other historians' work, Mackenzie's greatest contribution to the evolving historiography was his observations on the difficulty that any MacDonald seemed to have in writing an unbiased history of the family and its chieftains.²³ Although this comment

19 Ibid, 39.

20 Ibid, 51–52, 53, 55.

21 Ibid, 57.

22 A. Mackenzie, *History of the MacDonalds and Lords of the Isles* (Inverness, 1881).

23 Ibid, Preface.

was pointed principally at the seventeenth-century clan historians who had written very much from the perspective of their own segment of the MacDonalds' notions of where the headship of the by then fragmented kin rightfully lay and who clearly manipulated the historical evidence to suit their case, Mackenzie also very much had the contemporary MacDonald historians firmly in his sights. Although roundly criticised by those same historians, there is value in Mackenzie's efforts to draw together the various strands which comprised MacDonald historiography by the last quarter of the nineteenth century and reconcile it with the mainstream Lowland historiography that had burgeoned since Tytler's day. The result, however, is to modern eyes a bizarre series of quoted extracts from the principal authorities strung together with a commentary by Mackenzie that in places is clearly struggling to construct a coherent narrative from seemingly contradictory sources. It was, nevertheless, a generally positive view of the Lordship, albeit one that saw its proper historical context as being the wider history of the medieval kingdom rather than as an independent entity.

Amongst the most formidable of Mackenzie's critics were the Reverends Angus and Archibald MacDonald, whose three-volume study *The Clan Donald* was published between 1896 and 1904.²⁴ Their work remains the most comprehensive history of the clan and its various branches. Volume one was devoted to the rise of the family from the time of Somerled and traces its history through the senior line down to the death of Donald Dubh in 1545, bracketed by an introductory overview chapter outlining the pre-twelfth-century history of the Isles and two concluding chapters outlining the social history of the insular Gaidhealtachd and the ecclesiastical history of the area. Like Gregory, it was founded on exhaustive documentary analysis, volumes two and three drawing together much previously unpublished material from the archives of the various cadet lines of the clan. But herein lies one of its chief weaknesses, very much as Mackenzie had earlier warned; it is a partisan study, produced by and for MacDonalds and with a decidedly positive view of the contribution of the MacDonald Lords of the Isles to Scotland's history. In the MacDonalds' analysis, for example, the Highlands under the rule of Alexander 3rd Lord of the Isles and his son, John 4th Lord, was a haven of tranquillity in comparison to the faction-ridden south of the kingdom,²⁵ an assessment which neatly sidesteps the strife-torn early years of Alexander's lordship and sits ill at ease with the extensive accounts of plundering raids which they provide at length in

24 A. MacDonald and A. MacDonald, *The Clan Donald*, 3 volumes (Inverness, 1896–1904). See their comments on Mackenzie in vol 1, Preface, viii.

25 Ibid, 201–202, 244. See also comments on 208–209.

their discussion. This stance was also a reaction against the traditionally unsympathetic portrayal of the Highlands in mainly Lowland-focussed histories, their interpretation – as discussed below – becoming if anything yet more negative as the nineteenth century progressed. The result was a conscious turning of what Tytler had presented as Gaelic cultural vices into virtues, exemplified in the apology offered for Donald Balloch's role in the 1462 treaty negotiations with Edward IV of England, where it was his 'Celtic spirit, keen, restless, and eager', that led him to throw his energies into the scheme.²⁶ Although the MacDonalds' highly positive interpretation of events might have won favour with an increasingly Celtophilic element in Scottish academic and antiquarian circles – symbolised in the establishment of a Chair of Celtic at the University of Edinburgh in 1882 – it nevertheless stood in stark variance to the deeply-entrenched traditional Scottish historical canon. While their analysis of the documentary evidence and the transcriptions that they provided would win their work respect amongst academic historians, their stridently pro-MacDonald and Highland stance failed to secure broader recognition in the Scottish historical mainstream.

Despite Gregory and the MacDonalds' efforts, throughout the nineteenth century mainstream historical writing continued to define the relationship between the Lords of the Isles and the Scottish crown in terms of Tytler's struggle to the death between incompatibly opposed racial groups within a single nation. An extreme view of such cultural and racial collision was expressed in John Hill Burton's account of the MacDonald/Stewart confrontation at Harlaw, which he saw as the 'final struggle for supremacy between the Highlands and the Lowlands'.²⁷ He viewed these regions as having diverged irretrievably in terms of core values by the fourteenth century, with Lowland Scottish culture achieving unquestionable superiority at all levels over that of the Highlands. He dismissed any suggestion that Harlaw should be regarded as an episode in a civil conflict between parties who under other circumstances would have lived and worked in harmony; such partnership was not 'within their range of rational expectations'.²⁸ He claimed further that in Lowland Scotland Harlaw:

was felt as a more memorable deliverance even than that of Bannockburn. What it was to be subject to England the country knew and disliked; to be

26 Ibid, 236.

27 J. Hill Burton, *The History of Scotland from Agricola's Invasion to the Revolution of 1688*, new edition, vol 2 (Edinburgh, 1901), 389–390.

28 Ibid, 393.

subdued by their savage enemies of the mountains opened to them sources of terror of unknown character and extent.²⁹

His presentation of Highland-Lowland relations is charged with the language of ancient and implacable animosity, mutual hatred and irresolvable conflict based on racially-determined cultural opposites: industrious and diligent Lowland agriculturalists and burghers against idle, indolent and predatory Highlanders. This view ran counter to late Victorian Celtophilism in Scotland, especially following the Queen's express admiration of Highland culture since the late 1840s. It does, however, reflect the ambivalence displayed towards Gaelic culture more generally in late nineteenth-century Britain, where one segment of society's public expressions of conscience over the treatment of Highlanders since 1746 and more especially in respect of the Highland Clearances were matched by another's certainty in the moral and cultural degeneracy of the Gaels.

Hill Burton's stridently anti-Highland tone is at one historiographical extreme and few academic historians shared similar views. Racial difference, however, remained prominent in historical discussion of Lowland/Highland conflict. In his 1899 *History of Scotland*, Peter Hume Brown, the first Professor of Scottish History at the University of Edinburgh, shared Hill Burton's racial/cultural views. Again with reference to Harlaw's significance, he claimed that it '...ranks with the battle of Carham (1018) in its determining influence on the development of the Scottish nation [...] never since that day has Teutonic Scotland been in real danger from the Celtic race to whom it owed its being'.³⁰ Hume Brown's statement was made in the context of his discussion of the 'making of Scotland' and his view of the transformation of the nation from one where Scottish culture and society was predominantly Celtic in character to one where Lowland, English-speaking culture was regarded as characteristically Scottish. In his assessment, it was the ultimate triumph of Lowland over Highland culture that determined the whole future development of Scotland as a progressive, industrious nation, setting it on the path to eventual partnership with England.

Within the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Lowland Scottish historical tradition the affairs of the Lordship were problematical in that they ran contrary to the grand narratives of state-building and identity-shaping which were central to that tradition. The habit of writers such as Hill Burton and Hume Brown of referring to the Lowland districts and their populations as

29 Ibid, *History of Scotland*, vol 2, 394.

30 P. Hume Brown, *History of Scotland*, i, (Cambridge, 1899), 167.

Scotland/Scots and the Highlands and Islands as Celtic reinforced an idea of separation that positioned the northern and western parts of mainland Scotland and the Isles as at best marginal and at worst external to the medieval kingdom and its people. This trend reached its fullest expression in Andrew Lang's somewhat confused and often contradictory discussion of the relationship of the Lordship of the Isles with the rest of the kingdom. His account consisted of isolated vignettes thrown into a grand narrative that took the south-eastern Lowland experience as being representative of all of Scotland. Lang acknowledged his debt to Hume Brown in the preface to his work, and, while he disagreed with his 'overrated' description of Harlaw as 'a strife for Celtic or Lowland supremacy in the north',³¹ his down-playing of the significance of the battle was his only deviation from Hume Brown's wider thesis of a cultural clash. Lang's general treatment of Highland-Lowland relations hinges on a deep-seated racial antipathy that he believed was already in evidence in the twelfth century. In his stridently Whiggish view of Scotland's long march towards unity, stability and prosperity, the 'Celts' were incorrigible troublemakers whose actions on occasion threatened the security and indeed the existence of the kingdom, and whose behaviour required troublesome digressions from his chronological narrative of the events that truly made Scotland.³² Lang's use of language compounds the negative tone of his account: the alignment of John MacDonald with Edward Balliol in the 1330s, for example, was described as a purchasing of support from the "auld enemies of Scotland" the children of Somerled, the Celts of the West and the Isles.³³ His labelling of the Clan Sorley leadership in this matter as inveterate foes of the Scots is a generalisation that rests uncomfortably with both his earlier account of the adherence of Clan Donald to the Bruce cause, and his subsequent comments on the relationship between the same John and the Steward.³⁴

The most extreme manifestation of Lang's conflict over how to interpret Highland-Lowland relations in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries emerged in his account of the Harlaw campaign. In a convoluted passage where he claimed on the one hand that 'the Celts, as a whole, were nothing less than sturdy maintainers of Scottish independence' but on the other 'recognised no common part in Lowland patriotism', Lang ended by decrying the events of 1411 as proof 'that Scotland could be stabbed [...] from behind, by

31 A. Lang, *A History of Scotland*, 5th edition, vol 1 (Edinburgh, 1929), 292.

32 Lang, *History of Scotland*, vol 1, 372.

33 Ibid, 256.

34 See, for example, *ibid*, 217–219, 264, 265–266. His misnaming of some of the principal members of the Mac Somhairle lineage adds further to the confusion.

the Celtic pensioner of England'.³⁵ Indeed, he further speculated that Donald 2nd Lord's negotiations with Henry IV were intended to secure English military assistance for his adventure. In the end, despite an oddly Celtophilic strand in his work,³⁶ Lang identified with the Lowland 'Scots' and their supposed perception of the Highland 'Celts' as an enemy within. Like Hume Brown and Hill Burton before him, Lang presented this episode as a climactic event in a long-evolving conflict between racial or cultural groups who shared little common identity beyond their subjection to the same king. Indeed, the cultural gulf between the Highlanders and Lowlanders was deemed sufficient explanation for the tendency of the former to ally with the English against the latter, just as the Scots allied with the French. It was not, Lang explains, a matter of patriotism or any lack thereof; for the Celt, his own interests were paramount.³⁷ As with most accounts of the breakdown in Stewart-MacDonald relations, the final tipping-point in the breach came with the dispute over Ross. Regardless of the rights and wrongs in this issue, Lang laid stress on Donald's status as a pensioner of the English crown at this time and, with remarkable overstatement, claimed that to admit his right to Ross would have placed practically the whole of the North of Scotland in the hands of this unpredictable Celt. Not only was racial or cultural difference being raised as a critical dimension of the breach – although Lang is more tempered than most of his predecessors in his presentation of events – but the relationship of the greatest Celtic magnate with the king of England was being trailed by him as constituting a grave danger to the integrity or survival of the Scottish realm.³⁸

After the high drama of 1411, the Lordship vanished from Lang's nation-building narrative to re-emerge fleetingly in his discussion of the personal rule of James I. There, after a passing reference to the alignment of Alexander 3rd Lord's interests with those of the king in the destruction of the Albany Stewarts, the central themes are of Highland disorder juxtaposed with royal duplicity in the further undermining of Crown-MacDonald relations.³⁹ Alexander's son, John, received a similar cameo appearance in the narrative of internecine magnate feuding in the minority of James II, introduced as protector of James Livingstone after his fall from grace and, without explanation, in possession of

35 Ibid, 290–292.

36 For discussion of this tension in Lang's writing, see R.D. Oram, *David I: the King Who Made Scotland* (Stroud, 2004), 219–220.

37 Ibid, 291.

38 Ibid, 291–292.

39 Ibid, 304–306.

the royal castle at Urquhart on Loch Ness-side.⁴⁰ The seventeen-year-old John's seizure of Urquhart and Ruthven in Badenoch, and burning of Inverness – dismissed as an 'escapade' – and his cousin Donald Balloch's devastating raids on the Clyde coast are again simply presented as illustrations of the threat posed by Clan Donald to the kingdom's security and stability, but little rationale is offered for those events. The theme of treachery on the part of the Clan Donald leadership, however, re-emerges explicitly in Lang's discussion of Anglo-Scottish relations during the minority of James III. Then, in a return to the imagery employed in respect of the Harlaw conflict, John MacDonald's league with Edward IV of England was labelled as an opportunity to 'stab Scotland in the back with a Celtic dirk'.⁴¹

Throughout Lang's forays into Highland and Hebridean affairs it was John MacDonald who was the guiding hand behind Clan Donald's political and diplomatic manoeuvres; he was the 'Celtic wolf' who lorded it over the 'Lowland sheep'.⁴² This view of John 4th Lord as the driving-force in Clan Donald policy or as the dominant power even within the territories over which he was nominally lord is not one that accords well with more recent assessments,⁴³ nor does it sit comfortably with Lang's own wider discussion of Highland affairs. In his commentary on the downfall of the lordship from 1475 onwards he owed much to Gregory; while John remained central to the narrative he was presented as a pathetic figure, genuinely penitent and contrite, but whose efforts to reach a lasting settlement with the king were frustrated by his inability to control either his son or his other MacDonald kinsmen.⁴⁴ The final forfeiture of John and suppression of the lordship in 1493 merited a mere three sentences, while the aftermath was explained in simple terms of royal skill in James IV's adroit manipulation of rivalries within both Clan Donald and between the clans who sought to benefit from the elimination of their former overlord.⁴⁵ There were serious challenges ahead, but Lang's view was that James IV had settled the Highland problem 'as far as it ever was settled till after Culloden'.⁴⁶ Henceforward, the region's history could be treated simply as a side-event in the Scottish grand narrative.

40 Ibid, 327, 330.

41 Ibid, 336.

42 Ibid, 342.

43 See especially MacDougall, 'Achilles' Heel?.

44 Lang, *History of Scotland*, 342–343.

45 Ibid, 366, 370–372.

46 Ibid, 370.

While Hume Brown, Lang and their followers carried the Victorian historiographical tradition of a clash of two culturally-opposed races into the twentieth century, a divergent thesis had already emerged with the 1911 publication by R S Rait of the first modern academic articulation of an alternative interpretation.⁴⁷ Without naming Hill Burton, Rait explicitly rejected his view of the collision between MacDonald Lords and Stewart kings as being fundamentally racial and cultural in origin and pointed to the neutral accounts of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century sources. His down-playing of the race or culture dimension and emphasis instead on the dynastic politics that drove MacDonald-Stewart relations was endorsed enthusiastically in the 1930s by W C Mackenzie, who famously presented the most prominent example of those dynastic politics – Harlaw – as ‘...really a family squabble, all the parties being related by blood or marriage’.⁴⁸ That statement was later attacked as a trivialising of the significance of the battle,⁴⁹ but his critic missed a central point in Rait’s and Mackenzie’s discussions: the cultural hybridity of the leading combatants and the closeness of the political and familial links between the leadership on both sides.

Rait and his followers, however, failed to displace Hume Brown from his dominant position, principally through the pre-eminent place as the ‘standard’ work that Hume Brown’s *History* held in Scottish schools and universities. That pre-eminence was only countered effectively for the first time in the early 1960s when William Croft Dickinson, a successor to Hume Brown in the Scottish History chair at Edinburgh, produced a new overview of the kingdom’s evolution to 1603.⁵⁰ In a brief analysis all-too-often overlooked in more recent discussions, Croft Dickinson discounted explanations that followed a racial or cultural line and like Mackenzie stressed instead the cultural hybridity of the senior members of both the Stewarts and the MacDonalds.⁵¹ This approach was exemplified by his discussion of Donald 2nd Lord’s Stewart blood and status as a grandson of King Robert II, while in the case of Alexander Stewart, earl of Mar, he was one of the first modern scholars to attach significance to the earl’s Gaelic credentials and former status as a leader of caterans. Although individual components of Croft Dickinson’s thesis have been challenged more recently, it is essentially his vision of Highland/Lowland oppositions as a

47 R.S. Rait, *Scotland* (London, 1911), 111–112.

48 W.C. Mackenzie, *The Highlands and Islands of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1937), 94.

49 R. Nicholson, *Scotland: the Later Middle Ages* (Edinburgh, 1974), 236.

50 W. Croft Dickinson, *A New History of Scotland*, vol 1, *Scotland from the Earliest Times to 1603* (Edinburgh, 1961).

51 *Ibid*, 202.

protracted struggle for economic resources and political dominance amongst the Scottish ruling elite that still frames most modern discussion.

By the 1960s, the historiographical trend towards a narrative predicated upon a vision that equated 'national' history with the history of the dominant socio-economic and political zones of the kingdom had become established as the mainstream tradition. The 'making of the kingdom' theme that had run through Scottish historical writing since the early nineteenth century increasingly adopted a perspective where the Scottish crown and its most responsive agents were presented as positive forces struggling to build a stable state in the face of rebellious provinces and over-ambitious magnates with pretensions to independence. The extension of Scottish royal authority across mainland Scotland in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was discussed in terms of a regaining of rights that had been lost in the face of the Scandinavian irruption of the ninth to eleventh centuries or the elimination of dynastic rivals who had usurped the rightful powers of the men calling themselves kings of Scots. That restoration of royal authority was viewed as having reached its natural and logical limits under Alexander III, in whose reign the last portions of the supposed ancestral homeland of his dynasty in Argyll and the Isles was reintegrated into the kingdom. Despite recognition of how recent the assertion of Scottish lordship over the western Highlands and Hebrides was and how shallowly-rooted any notion of a distinctly Scottish identity for themselves was on the part of the Islesmen, the subsequent history of the region was being constructed in the new narrative histories from a firmly Lowland and monarchocentric perspective. The history of the Lordship of the Isles especially was viewed from within the bubble of this national historiography as part of that sub-set labelled as later medieval crown-magnate relations.

One of the most influential manifestations of this trend appeared in J D Mackie's single-volume *A History of Scotland*, first published in 1964 and re-published in successive editions down to the late 1990s. Allowance must be made for the constraints of the single-volume overview format, but in the construction of its strongly Whiggish narrative Mackie underplayed the centripetal impulses that emanated from the cultural diversity of the hybrid and synthetic state constructed by the descendents of Malcolm III and overplayed the unifying role of Scottish kingship. Thus, the relationship of the four MacDonald Lords of the Isles with the Stewarts was observed through the lens of crown-magnate politics and presented as a manifestation of the conflict between over-mighty, self-serving nobles and a far-sighted, high-minded monarchy that he viewed as the dominant theme in the political history of the later

fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.⁵² The Lord of the Isles may have ‘exercised authority almost independent of that of the King’,⁵³ but there was no question that he was anything other than a Scottish nobleman operating within the political sphere of the kingdom. For Mackie, the early fifteenth-century struggle for Ross was a straightforward dispute over title and inheritance between rival members of a single social group, ‘misrepresented as a struggle between Highland and Lowland’;⁵⁴ while James I’s actions against both the MacDonalds and their Albany Stewart rivals was one dimension of his aggressive reassertion of crown authority over the magnates. Thus, too, the forfeiture of Ross in 1475/6 became simply part of James III’s reimposition of royal power in the aftermath of the disorder of his minority,⁵⁵ while the forfeiture of 1493 was a solution to the almost endemic disturbance of the north-west Highlands and Islands that stemmed from John MacDonald’s inability to provide good lordship.⁵⁶ James IV’s forceful action was the epitome of good lordship and strong government, while the behaviour of John, his son Angus Óg, and his nephew Alexander of Lochalsh, represented the antithesis of those virtues.

Mackie’s view of the political context for the Lordship found similar expression in Rosalind Mitchison’s 1970 one-volume history. Although she highlighted its cultural and social distinctiveness, her discussion placed the Lordship within the wider context of the Scottish noble community and compared the political behaviour of the Lords to other Scottish – and indeed French – magnates.⁵⁷ Interestingly, she focussed on the comparisons to be made with the Dukes of Brittany, especially the quasi-regal trappings with which the positions of Duke and Lord were imbued and their semi-detached relationship with the kingdoms to which they were at least nominally subject. But she also drew important distinctions: Breton dukes had a complex bureaucracy to support their government; the Lords of the Isles depended on personal influence and force to provide the ‘governing machinery’ of their principality. This latter point is of crucial importance in her discussion of the John 4th Lord, who was dismissed in terms of which Donald Gregory would have approved. In her words, John ‘was not a man to drive anything through consistently’; his personal weakness contributed significantly to the ultimate collapse of the

52 J.D. Mackie, *A History of Scotland* (London, 1964), chapter 5 ‘The Crown and the Barons 1371–1488’.

53 *Ibid.*, 89.

54 *Ibid.*, 97.

55 *Ibid.*, 100.

56 *Ibid.*, 114–115.

57 R. Mitchison, *A History of Scotland*, 2nd edition (London, 1982), 59, 64–65, 71–72.

power of the Lordship.⁵⁸ Wider exploration of the fall of the Lordship, however, again emphasised the place of the MacDonalds within the magnate community, their behaviour again being compared directly with their peer-group elsewhere in Scotland. Mitchison concluded her discussion of the forfeiture of the Lordship and its aftermath with observations presented wholly from a central government perspective: James IV had dealt with the Lordship just as he would have dealt with any troublesome magnate anywhere in the kingdom, but in so doing he failed to recognise the role that even a weak Lord of the Isles had played in binding together the fractious kindreds of the Gaelic West. For Mitchison, it was the demise of the Lordship at James's hands that created the disorder in which 'clan chiefs [began to come] forward and act as nearly independent rulers'.⁵⁹ Although somewhat grudging in tone, it is also a surprisingly upbeat assessment of the positive contribution of the Lordship in a historical analysis that is resolutely focussed on 'the making of the kingdom'.

These themes were explored in greater detail and with more subtlety by Ranald Nicholson in his 1974 contribution to the four-volume *Edinburgh History of Scotland*. His work attracted much criticism in the 1980s and 1990s for its monarchocentric perspective and its decidedly bleak vision of crown-magnate relations under the Stewart kings down to James IV, but more recently its analysis of the essentially negative role of the over-mighty subject in medieval Scottish political life has regained more widespread academic acceptance. His treatment of the Lordship of the Isles is more problematical, for there are clear tensions in his exploration of the cultural difference between the Gaelic Highlands and Islands and the anglophone Lowlands which points to a unity of identity and a separation of existence, and his discussion of the political activities of the Lords which occurs largely within a frame of Scottish crown-magnate relations. This tension was clear in Nicholson's exploration of the career of John 1st Lord, and the domain over which he ruled, which occurred in a series of sections dispersed across three chapters. When John was first discussed in detail it was in the context of his political opportunism, which Nicholson argues saw him commit to neither side in the Bruce-Balliol conflict of the 1330s. Although presented as operating within the frame of Scottish domestic politics, John was portrayed as manoeuvring adroitly as a semi-detached agent between the rival factions to maximise his parchment-based territorial acquisitions without being obliged to commit his resources militarily.⁶⁰ Although he reached a 'final concord' in 1343 which bound him to

58 Ibid, 75, 82.

59 Ibid, 82–83.

60 Nicholson, *Later Middle Ages*, 142–143.

David II, his avoidance of the 1346 campaign is perhaps a better measure of his commitment to Bruce kingship. John's subsequent return to a policy of aggressive neutrality, where he capitalised on opportunities to enhance his own position without committing himself to the continuing Scottish civil war and Anglo-Scottish conflict, again reveals him as a free agent operating in the voids between the spheres of Scottish or English power.⁶¹ His marriage into the Stewarts which occurred in the midst of this period, however, was used by Nicholson in the first instance to illustrate John's revival of the Hebrides-based domain of his ancestor Somerled, but was developed also to stress his integration into a network of strategic alliances that united a group of lords – the Steward, the Lord of the Isles, the Earl of Ross, and the heads of the MacDougall and Campbell kindreds – in what he labelled as 'a sort of "Highland Party"'.⁶² John, in this analysis, was at once a semi-detached agent yet simultaneously integrated through a network of marital and political alliances into one of the most powerful groupings within the mainland Scottish magnate community.

With John's great-grandson and namesake, John 4th Lord, Nicholson's discussion initially presented him as a senior Scottish nobleman – it was as the Earl of Ross that he was most often identified – and focused on his role in the crown-magnate conflicts of James II's reign.⁶³ Although a party to the bond which some contemporary sources saw as the catalyst for the king's murder of the 8th Earl of Douglas in 1452, John played no part in James's final confrontation with the Black Douglasses in 1455 and participated, albeit through proctors, in the parliamentary process that ended the conflict. Nicholson saw the king as having bought Ross's neutrality, but both the bribes and the outcome were part of an unquestionably Scottish political process; neutral or otherwise, John was fully engaged within the Scottish political community. That engagement grew stronger as the reign progressed, and it was as a magnate of Scotland and loyal vassal of the crown that John participated in the 1460 campaign which ended in the king's death at Roxburgh.⁶⁴

Nicholson followed the traditional historiographical view in seeing a significant shift in the 4th Lord's political behaviour after the death of James II. From that point, Nicholson believed that he was drawn into direct dealings with the English crown that led ultimately to treasonable treaties with Edward IV.⁶⁵

61 Ibid, 154.

62 Ibid, 155–156.

63 Ibid, 374.

64 Ibid, 396. He likewise loyally joined James III's muster of 1481 that ended in the coup at Lauder Bridge.

65 Ibid, 401–403.

John was, in his view, the active agent in this business. His behaviour Nicholson likened to that of Charles the Bold, duke of Burgundy, who responded violently to the constraints brought by growth of a unitary French state under the Valois kings from Charles VII onwards: the new and aggressively assertive Scottish monarchy that James I and James II had established was similarly unattractive to the MacDonalds. Nicholson, however, went beyond the analogy, suggesting that the cultural homogeneity of John's domain offered greater potential as state-forming material than the culturally and linguistically diverse lands of Duke Charles. But, although he agreed with previous assessments of John as 'steeped in duplicity' and being the 'Celtic dirk' with which Edward IV could stab Scotland in the back if he were so inclined,⁶⁶ he stepped back from any suggestion that the Earl of Ross was seeking to create an independent state. There is an inference, too, that John's actions in 1460–2 were more posturing than indicative of real intent: certainly, by 1464 he had made no move to activate the terms of his treaty with Edward IV and instead negotiated with the government of the underage James III and made restitution for his earlier behaviour.⁶⁷

Nicholson's implied leadership failings on John's part are voiced – but only slightly more clearly – in his account of the forfeiture of Ross in 1475/6. His deficiencies, however, were expressed in terms of uninspiring military leadership rather than any deeper defect of character, and the consequences of his submission were expressed firstly in terms of the opening up of northern and western Scotland to Lowland influences rather than its impact on his personal position.⁶⁸ Nicholson, however, went on to argue that the events of 1476 created fault lines within the MacDonald family, attributing to the surrender of Ross a decisive role in the breach between John and his heir which by 1481 had seen John reduced to the status of 'a mere protégé of the crown'.⁶⁹ With John lacking means to express any effective lordship despite his titular headship of the kindred, rather than solving the crown's problems in the Highlands the part-forfeiture of 1475/6 had instead opened a Pandora's Box with younger and more hawkish members of the family seeking to assert their personal leadership. Nicholson's discussion of their warlike adventures in the 1480s and early 1490s gives the impression of unfocussed, random violence and descent into general disorder in the Highlands and Islands, a situation that 'offended the

66 The quotes are from A.I. Dunlop, *The Life and Times of James Kennedy, Bishop of St Andrews* (Edinburgh, 1950), 223 and Lang, *History of Scotland*, vol 1, 336.

67 Nicholson, *Later Middle Ages*, 406–407.

68 Ibid, 481.

69 Ibid, 482.

majesty of the new monarchy' until eventually the exasperated king was forced into decisive action.⁷⁰ And it was, in Nicholson's eyes, James IV who took the lead in the forfeiture of 1493 and who continued to direct operations there. In his final assessment it was a combination of Lowland cultural alienation from the Highlanders, weak or divided leadership, but above all the incompatibility of a semi-independent principality with the ambitions of a unitary monarchy and that monarchy's violent intrusion of its authority into MacDonald territory that precipitated the fall of the Lordship.

Nicholson's vision of later medieval Scotland and of the place of the Lordship within it has displayed remarkable historiographical stamina and its legacy is writ large in a broad raft of more recent works. Only three years after the first publication of his work, however, an alternative view of the Lordship which presented it in a far more positive light appeared in print. Like Nicholson's account, this text has proven to have enduring influence over more recent scholars and is claimed by some to be the most authoritative analysis of the Lordship to date. Published as an appendix to the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland's *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture in the West Highlands*, John Bannerman's twelve-page essay was intended only to provide background to the monument-specific historical discussion offered in the main body of the volume.⁷¹ It offers neither a comprehensive chronological overview of the MacDonald Lordship nor any developed discussion of the internal dynamics which contributed to its demise but it does articulate clearly the lineal development of a West Highland and Hebridean power-bloc from the last days of Dalriada in the ninth century, through the Kingdom of the Isles and the realm constructed by Somerled in the twelfth century, to the later medieval Lordship of Somerled's heirs. This political narrative is balanced by a second strand in which Bannerman focused on the cultural unity of the territories under MacDonald domination in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and emphasised how their all-embracing political leadership of the Scottish Gaidhealtachd provided the stimulus for an efflorescence of a distinctive Gaelic tradition in the arts. The failure of the Lordship, although not paralleled by an immediate failure of the Gaelic artistic tradition, signalled the end of what proved with hindsight to have been a Golden Age of cultural achievement.

70 Ibid, 541–542.

71 J.W.M. Bannerman, 'The Lordship of the Isles – Historical Background', in K.A. Steer and J.W.M. Bannerman (eds), *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture in the West Highlands* (Edinburgh, 1977), 201–213.

Within his discussion, Bannerman highlighted several factors that he saw as having contributed to the establishment of MacDonald dominance and to the particular character of their Lordship. He identified in particular the dissipative tendencies of the kin-based societies of Ireland and Scotland and the resulting alternation in the headship of the kindred between different branches through processes that were not always peaceful.⁷² His belief in some kind of rotating headship of the kin, reflected in the title *Rí Innse Gall* (King of the Islands of the Foreigners) held by the acknowledged head, with a subordinate title of *Rí Airir Goídel* (King of Argyll/Coastland of the Gael) held by another kin-member, may not be favoured by more recent scholars, but his portrayal of competition between the descendants of Somerled for primacy is widely accepted.

Following the established historiographical tradition, Bannerman saw the main branches of Somerled's descendants as developing their powerbase in the interstices between the territories which recognised the overlordship of either the kings of Norway (in the Hebrides) or the kings of Scots (on the mainland). This position, he argued, permitted these families to operate as independent agents who paid lip-service to their nominal overlords. It is not explained how or why, but Bannerman suggested that it was this degree of political independence that perhaps led to them being 'more wholly committed to a purely Gaelic society and culture than the rest of Scotland'.⁷³ Nevertheless, as Scottish political influence increased in the thirteenth century and their overlordship of the Isles was confirmed by treaty in 1266, Bannerman conceded that the Gaelic character of their territories, particularly its cultural and social system, began 'to exhibit certain features which derived from a closer contact with East Scotland'. Somerled's own Scandinavian heritage was casually overlooked in this analysis and the vision of the Western Isles in particular as a zone of uniformly Gaelic culture from the twelfth to fifteenth centuries was accepted *de facto*. The historical conditions for the extension of Clan Donald lordship over all this zone of common Gaelic culture were projected back into the period from the ninth to thirteenth centuries; the MacDonald Lordship was, it seems, historically preordained.

Bannerman's inclination to translate cultural zones into political entities led him to make similar propositions for the extent of MacDonald lordship on the mainland. Basing his view on the genealogical sections within the document known prosaically as *MS 1467*, he proposed that the compiler of that document had intended the list of clan chiefs which he had constructed to be

72 Ibid, 202.

73 Ibid, 202.

understood as comprising those who, in his opinion, acknowledged MacDonald overlordship.⁷⁴ In addition to the clans who occupied the Hebrides, Ross and Lochaber, the compiler of the manuscript named all of the leading mid and north Argyll clans – headed by the Campbells and the MacDougalls – and those occupying the territory which would later be labelled Breadalbane, principally the MacGregors, MacNabs and MacLarens, spread from Glenstrae in the west to Balquhiddier in the east. The circumstances for this eastward expansion of MacDonald influence, Bannerman proposed, was the collapse of the traditional Gaelic kin-based power-structure within much of this region consequent on the forfeiture in the early fourteenth century of what he saw as the ‘Celtic earldom of Atholl’.⁷⁵ Again, more recent scholarship calls into question the extent to which Breadalbane fell under the political leadership of Atholl before the fourteenth century and it is also questionable to what degree the Strathbogie earls of Atholl could be regarded as ‘Celtic’ by c.1300. Instead, Balquhiddier, Glen Dochart, Glen Lyon, the lands bordering Loch Tay, and the district of Rannoch, appear to have been a series of discrete lordships over much of which Stewart control was being established from the 1360s.⁷⁶ Bannerman recognised that the eastward reach of the MacDonalds may have been transitory or reflected more in terms of cultural leadership than political overlordship, but he did see that leadership as enduring into at least the mid-sixteenth century.⁷⁷ This view he based on the contents of the *Book of the Dean of Lismore*, compiled by the brothers James and Duncan MacGregor, the first of whom was vicar of Fortingall in Glen Lyon and dean of Argyll, based at Lismore. Compiled in Breadalbane and containing poems composed in the ‘narrow corridor extending as far as Loch Awe’, then opening out to include one in praise of MacLeod of Lewis at one geographical extreme and MacNeill of Gigha at the other, it was in Bannerman’s view only in the context of the Lordship of the Isles that this spread can be understood. Given the extension of Campbell power within the mainland component of this zone before the end of the fifteenth century, however, it must be questioned how real even a memory of the cultural leadership of the Lordship was amongst anyone other than the Gaelic intelligentsia.

There is less controversy in Bannerman’s analysis of the fall of the Lordship. He identified two main issues that created tensions which contributed to the

74 Ibid, 205.

75 Ibid, 206.

76 S. Boardman, *The Early Stewart Kings: Robert II and Robert III* (East Linton, 1996), 169–170.

77 Bannerman, ‘Appendix II’, 206.

failure of John 4th Lord and the collapse of MacDonald power. One is widely acknowledged by all those who have worked on the history of the Lordship: the MacDonalds' 'penchant for treating with the kings of England'.⁷⁸ The other, however, is significantly more insightful; their attempts to consolidate their authority in Ross. The importance of the earldom to the MacDonalds had been recognised by all scholars since Tytler but the view generally had been that control of Ross had been secure from the outset, founded on the support within the earldom and its kin networks gained through Donald's marriage to Mary Leslie. Bannerman recognised the early success of the MacDonalds in winning support amongst leading Ross kindreds like the Mackenzies but highlighted also how longer term their possession of the earldom came to depend on their military presence and strength at any given time.⁷⁹ This general comment has been developed upon substantially by more recent scholars (as discussed below) but it was Bannerman who first highlighted the shallowness of support for the MacDonalds within the earldom. He pointed to the absence of any substantial kin network around the Leslies, who had themselves been intruded into Ross in the late 1360s, contrasting this situation with the network which marriage to Amy MacRuairi had brought for John 1st Lord and which gave their son a powerbase as head of what became the Clanranald MacDonalds. In Ross, the MacDonalds were confronted by the already alienated Ross kindred who had been separated from the comital title through the forced intrusion of the Leslies by King David II. The second factor arose directly from this lack of embedded kin network, for the only means of delivering domination was a military solution which exacerbated rather than helped to resolve the alienation of the established regional kindreds. Forcible intrusion of members of the MacDonald kindred or their main vassal families was only viable where a sustained effort could be mounted, and it emerged that the Lord of the Isles had neither the resources nor the time to commit to any sustained or systematic programme of military domination and settlement in Ross. The intermittent efforts of the MacDonalds to consolidate their grip on Ross therefore served only to sharpen opposition to them and undermine their authority there, weaknesses that were exposed to devastating effect after 1475. MacDonald efforts to recover possession in the 1480s and 1490s divided the kindred and diverted energy from consolidating its control over what remained of the Lordship, while at the same time entrenching opposition locally within Ross and confirming in crown eyes the dangerous unpredictability of the kindred and its role as a disturber of the peace of the realm. In Bannerman's final

78 Ibid, 206.

79 Ibid, 205.

assessment, it was these political factors rather than any fear of the Lordship's status as the Gaelic 'Other' within Scotland that sealed its fate.

It was this contribution of the earldom of Ross to the fall of John MacDonald, as outlined by Bannerman, that was taken up by Norman MacDougall in his 1982 *James III: a Political Study*.⁸⁰ He identified a feud in the north between John and George Gordon, earl of Huntly, as a critical factor in the increasing level of disturbance centred on Ross and in encouraging the king to take decisive action, adding to the traditional case based on John's treasonable dealings with England and his illegal seizures of crown revenues in Inverness and Moray.⁸¹ Equally critical in his view, however, was the tension within the MacDonald family that Nicholson had earlier highlighted but with greater importance being placed on the ineffectiveness of John MacDonald as head of kin. MacDougall conceded that John's position was impossible but that he worsened it by indecision and inaction as, in MacDougall's words, he 'dithered from one alliance to the next in an unsuccessful attempt to prove himself an effective clan leader and Crown servant at one and the same time'.⁸² It was a theme that recurred with increasing emphasis in subsequent analyses over the next two decades.

In its strikingly negative portrayal of James III and of crown-magnate relations in later fifteenth-century Scotland, MacDougall was working very much in the Nicholson tradition. By the early 1980s, however, an alternative school of thought had emerged that was articulating alternative visions of the nature of later medieval Scotland's political community. The most forceful reaction against Nicholson's dystopian view of crown-magnate relations emerged in the late 1970s in the work of the young scholars of what has come to be termed 'the new orthodoxy', represented principally by Jenny Brown or Wormald and Alexander Grant. The most significant of these in terms of understanding of the Lordship was Grant's alternative view of its place in Scottish history. Developing from an initial reappraisal of the relations between John 4th Lord and James, 9th earl of Douglas published in 1981,⁸³ his revisionist interpretation received its first fully-developed articulation in his contribution to the *New History of Scotland* series, which was under the general editorship of Jenny Wormald. Published in 1984, *Independence and Nationhood: Scotland 1306–1469* and the series in general took a thematic approach which although not

80 N. MacDougall, *James III: a Political Study* (Edinburgh, 1982).

81 Ibid, 123.

82 Ibid, 124.

83 A. Grant, 'The Revolt of the Lord of the Isles and the Death of the Earl of Douglas, 1451–1452', *Scottish Historical Review*, 60 (1981), 169–174.

entirely eschewing traditional chronological narratives was less overtly teleological and made a conscious effort to move away from the 'great man' and 'state-builder' traditions of previous generations.⁸⁴ This trend was evident in everything from the non-traditional date-range of the volume – from Robert Bruce's seizure of the Scottish throne to the end of the minority of James III – to the avoidance of reign-based chapters and exploration of broad themes, such as Highlands and Lowlands. While revisionist in perspective, Grant's re-evaluation of Highland-Lowland relations and, within that, of Stewart-MacDonald relations was neither apologetic nor eulogistic in tone. Cultural difference mattered: the Lordship was 'a self-consciously and even aggressively Gaelic institution', whose actions on occasion could be regarded as threatening by the Lowlands-based government.⁸⁵ Expansionism, as displayed by the Lords of the Isles, was a cultural condition that sprang from the kin-based structures of Gaelic society; it was not a manifestation of some primordial antipathy between rival cultures. A second significant departure from traditional histories in Grant's new analysis was his shifting of the focus away from the vision of the Stewart-MacDonald relationship as a bipolar conflict between two power-blocs that represented opposed cultural and political halves of Scotland. The key to understanding why those two parties came into collision, he argued, was to recognise the significance of the disintegration of the lordship structures and kin-networks that had been established in the central Highland region down to the Wars of Independence.⁸⁶ It was the collapse of the old regime in Moray, he believed, that brought the 'essentially peripheral' Lordship into collision with their equally essentially peripheral Stewart kinsmen as both manoeuvred opportunistically for maximum advantage in a reconfigured political landscape.

In his closer examination of the MacDonald Lordship, Grant's analysis made a series of shifts from traditional perspectives. One of the most important of these was to question the notion of the Lordship as a monolithic block whose uniting identity was provided by a shared culture that was thoroughly Gaelic and kin-based in character. Whilst acknowledging the strengths of Bannerman's presentation of the growth of MacDonald power as 'a manifestation of the natural fluctuations within kin-based society', he challenged the notion of the Lords as culturally conservative kin-based chieftains who held innovation and alien traditions at bay.⁸⁷ Most significant in his eyes was John 1st Lord's use

84 A. Grant, *Independence and Nationhood: Scotland 1306–1469* (London, 1984).

85 Ibid, 205.

86 Ibid, 206–209.

87 Ibid, 211.

of 'feudal' legal mechanisms to extend and consolidate his power and, by extension, to fix control of his enlarged dominion in the hands of his son and grandson, removing the possibility of descent to collaterals within his wider kin. Authority over them and over the greater landowners within the Lordship, moreover, was founded on feudal relationships defined by charters. In essence, Grant was stressing the similarity of power-relationships forged within their Lordship by the MacDonalds and those employed by crown and magnates elsewhere within the kingdom.⁸⁸

Here, however, Grant drew a line: cultural difference might not have truly distinguished the Lords' political lordship from that of their peers elsewhere in Scotland but in other aspects of their social behaviour it was of prime significance. Self-conscious projection of their place at the head of Gaelic society, a role wholeheartedly endorsed by Gaelic poets and craftsmen in their work, masked much of the cultural similarity between the MacDonalds and other Scottish lords. Strident assertion of cultural dissimilarity, perhaps especially the glorification of the violent projection of the virile qualities of Gaelic lordship, might indeed have heightened the sense of difference between Highland and Lowland peoples.⁸⁹ That difference, too, was sharpened by the manner in which their expansion was effected: exertion of military pressure; imposition of *de facto* superiority; extraction of resources; and establishment of lasting possession (often with belated formal government ratification).

Closely linked with this militarised projection of lordship in entrenching cultural difference and a detachment from Lowland Scottish political society that was more than simply perceptual was, in Grant's view, the fundamental relationship of the Lords with the Scottish crown. For him, this position stemmed from an absence of a 'feudal settlement' between the Scottish crown and the MacDonalds in the manner that it had occurred for their former west-coast rivals the MacDougalls.⁹⁰ This is not the place to question the premise upon which that view was founded, for the research that suggests that there was a closer relationship between the crown and the MacDonalds in the thirteenth century was not available when Grant was writing. What is more important is to recognise the significance of what he saw as the underlying motivation that drew MacDonalds into what were essentially marriages of convenience with the Bruces and then the Stewarts; that timeless flawed aphorism of 'my enemy's enemy is my friend'. The Bruce-MacDonald alliance had deeper roots than their shared hostility to the MacDougalls, but MacDonald-Stewart

88 Ibid, 212.

89 Ibid, 212–213.

90 Ibid, 214.

alignment may well have arisen from their mutual rivalry with the Randolphs in the central and west Highlands. A common rival, however, did not mean common ambitions and, rather than any commitment to the Bruce-Stewart kingship MacDonald association with those families was predicated principally on opportunities for territorial aggrandisement. The result was semi-detachment from mainstream Scottish political agendas that was only managed by the crown through either forceful imposition of royal sovereignty which brought reluctant – and usually temporary – submission or *laissez-faire* policies aimed at securing co-operation that were successful for only so long as they were to MacDonald advantage.⁹¹

With perhaps too much of a teleological eye to the final denouement of Stewart-MacDonald relations in the 1490s, Grant's discussion of the Lordship concluded with an appraisal of the situation prevailing after 1431. Contrary to traditional presentations of 1411 and the battle of Harlaw as the turning-point in Highland history he saw 1431 and Inverlochy as the key moment. Grant argued that the Inverlochy campaign revealed to the Lowlands-based government that the western Highlands were probably even more of a problem without a Lord of the Isles than with him. James I, he believed, either abandoned any conscious effort to impose his authority over the region or accepted that only Alexander MacDonald had the ability to do so. The consequence of this change in policy was acknowledgement of MacDonald claims to Ross, possession of which combined with the disappearance of the alternative focal points of regional lordship in the Stewart earldom of Mar and the Dunbar earldom of Moray elevated the MacDonalds to unquestioned regional pre-eminence. The result, however, Grant saw as a possible relocation of the centre of political gravity within the MacDonald territories, with Ross taking central importance, and the emergence of Alexander, as Earl of Ross, as a pivotal figure in the government of the North. Indeed, Alexander's subsequent career could be presented as that of a fairly conventional Scottish magnate. Grant's final observation, however, was that regardless of Alexander's personal behaviour the moment for smooth assimilation of the MacDonalds and their domain within the rest of the kingdom was long past.⁹²

Of all the material on the Lordship published in the 1980s the most substantial was the edition of the acts of the Lords of the Isles by Jean and William

91 Ibid, 214–215.

92 These themes were revisited in his subsequent essay 'Scotland's "Celtic Fringe" in the Late Middle Ages: The MacDonald Lords of the Isles and the Kingdom of Scotland', in R.R. Davies (ed), *The British Isles 1100–1500* (Edinburgh 1988) 118–141.

Munro.⁹³ While the charters and other acts contained in that volume constitute one of the most valuable collections of edited sources for Clan Donald lordship between 1336 and 1493, the introduction and appendices to them provide an equally rich resource for scholars. Here for the first time was set out not just a narrative discussion of the Lords and their political relationships, but also comprehensive genealogical information, detailed analysis of their landholding, discussion of their government and administration, relations with the Church in the Isles, and diplomatic dealings with regional, national and international neighbours. With around half of their volume's 321 pages of text devoted to these discursive sections, although produced as an edition of the surviving parchment record for the Lordship, the *Acts of the Lords of the Isles* was the most comprehensive historical analysis yet produced on the subject. It was, however, a fairly conservative analysis and, with their avowedly insular perspective,⁹⁴ avoided anything beyond presentation of a synthesis of the then-current discussion revolving around the Lords' political activities on the mainland. But this is also part of its great value, for their general objectivity and the dispassionate tone of their discussion avoided the partisanship of previous commentators while nevertheless imprinting a strongly positive impression of the Lords and their achievements on their audience. Most importantly, however, the Munros had produced a tool of immense value to scholars which drew together in one gathering the surviving record evidence for the Lords and for their relationship with their vassals in both their Hebridean and mainland domain. In so doing, they set a new baseline for analysis and enabled the next generation of scholars to embark upon a rigorous reappraisal of the place of the MacDonalds and their Lordship in the medieval kingdom.

The generally positive assessments of Grant and the Munros and the portrayal of cultural Golden Age as presented by Bannerman were drawn together in the new historiography of the late 1980s and early 1990s in what seems like a rehabilitation or vindication of the MacDonalds. The synthesis offered by Michael Lynch in his 1991 single-volume history reflects the scale of the shift that had occurred in the historical mainstream perspective since the 1970s. From the Nicholson, Bannerman and Grant discussions, Lynch took the cultural distinctiveness of the Lordship, in which the MacDonalds 'fostered a renewed, self-conscious pan-Celtic Gaeldom', and the peace and stability which their rule restored to a region that had suffered political disintegration during the long years of Balliol-Bruce conflict after 1296.⁹⁵ The focus in the

93 *ALI*.

94 *Ibid.* xix.

95 M. Lynch, *Scotland: A New History* (London, 1991), 67.

discussion is on the manner in which the notion of a 'Highland problem' was manufactured in the minds of Lowlanders, exacerbated by a Lowland tendency to increasingly label themselves as 'Scots' while the Highlanders were distinguished as 'Irish'. Lynch opposed this to the view in the *Gaidhealtachd* which on the one hand was built around a notion of a 'pan-Celtic Gaeldom' encompassing Ireland and the north and west of Scotland, while on the other it preserved an allegiance to both the idea of 'Scotland' and to the person of the king of Scots.⁹⁶ Lynch chose to illustrate this opposition between Lowland fear of an increasingly culturally alien Highlands and the Highland view of their intrinsic Scottishness with the example of Alexander Stewart, the 'Wolf of Badenoch', the third son of King Robert II and politically-ambitious for a role in the government of the kingdom but also a leader of Highland caterans and a man who had adopted many of the cultural traits of Gaelic kin-based society. His intrusion into the Highlands, Lynch argued, was just one manifestation of a long tradition of Lowland disruption of Highland society that culminated in James IV's 'attempted eclipse' of the Lordship in 1493.⁹⁷ This quiet reversal of over a century of Lowland-centred Scottish historiography, however, was simply slipped into the discussion and left hanging.

In general, Lynch otherwise wove his account of the rise and fall of the MacDonalds into his narrative in a fairly conventional manner, following the main themes that had been set out by Nicholson, Bannerman and Munro in their overviews. On the demise of the Lordship in the years after 1475/6, however, he developed on the point first made by Bannerman concerning the tenuousness of the MacDonald hold over Ross, and MacDougall's highlighting of the earldom as the main source of conflict for the family in the 1480s and 1490s, referring to it as 'the Achilles' heel' which helped the crown to break the power of the family.⁹⁸ James III's restoration of John MacDonald to his island territories in 1476 and creation as a Lord of Parliament in 1478 he presented as an attempt to integrate the semi-detached Gaelic districts of Scotland more fully into the realm under crown authority in a manner that he suggested anticipated the sixteenth-century Tudor policy of surrender and regrant in respect of Gaelic Irish chieftains. The effort, however, he concluded was a failure, for he saw Clan Donald power in the Isles as 'barely touched' by crown or parliamentary action and it was ultimately divisions within the kindred that pitched John against first his son and then his

96 Ibid, 68.

97 Ibid, 69.

98 Ibid, 167.

nephew in a series of bids to regain Ross that drove the crown finally to intervene again in 1493.⁹⁹

Lynch's conclusions on the causes and consequences of the fall of the Lordship between 1475/6 and 1493 reveal several tensions in the historiography as he sought to reconcile the traditionally negative vision of mainstream Lowland convention with the more up-beat tone of Bannerman and Grant. As an overview, he was also unable to develop his discussion in depth on most of the issues that he presented as central in the debates over the Lordship's demise. It also meant that he was unable to explore less widely-accepted arguments, notably that voiced by Bannerman in the 1970s, when he had raised important questions over the stability of the Lordship from the 1430s onwards, particularly with regard to what could be regarded as a manifestation of 'imperial overstretch' in Alexander 3rd Lord's acquisition of Ross. Lynch accepted the general view that Ross was a source of instability within the MacDonald domain, but for Bannerman it was more like a lethal drug. He saw MacDonald inability to commit the resources necessary to convert titular lordship over the earldom into secure possession yet reluctance to concede that inability and achieve some form of rapprochement with the regional kindreds who held real power locally as fatally weakening the Lordship under Alexander's son, John. It was an intriguing proposition but, other than give a nod to it in their overarching narratives, no scholar had sought to test the thesis until 2000, when Norman MacDougall published his analysis of what he labelled, using Lynch's term, the Lordship's 'Achilles' Heel'.¹⁰⁰ In that paper, MacDougall developed on an idea he had advanced in outline in 1982 and presented a detailed critique of the political collapse of MacDonald fortunes from its apogee under Alexander – 'easily the greatest magnate in the entire Highlands'¹⁰¹ – to the dissolution of the Lordship under John and his would-be successors.

Starting with an assessment of the young John MacDonald's inheritance in 1449, MacDougall broadly accepted Grant's argument that beneath the superficial veneer of territorial supremacy within the Highlands and Islands reinforced by possession of key offices and titles MacDonald power was remarkably fragile and that along with all the lands and status John had also inherited over two generations of Crown-MacDonald hostility.¹⁰² It is MacDougall's view

99 Ibid, 168.

100 N. MacDougall, 'Achilles' Heel? The Earldom of Ross, the Lordship of the Isles and the Stewart Kings', in Cowan, E.J. and McDonald, R.A. (eds), *Alba. Celtic Scotland in the Medieval Era* (East Linton, 2000), 248–275.

101 Grant, *Independence and Nationhood*, 218.

102 MacDougall, 'Achilles' Heel?', 249–250.

that it was recognition of that fragility rather than any sense of unassailable strength that led John and his advisers to negotiate his marriage to Elizabeth Livingstone, daughter of the man who controlled the adolescent King James II and effectively ran the court. Through her, the MacDonalds might have hoped for an improvement in their relations with the crown.¹⁰³ Unfortunately for John, within weeks of his marriage, Livingstone was toppled from power as the young king asserted his authority. MacDougall's discussion of MacDonald reaction to these events still follows Grant's analysis but his exploration of the king's response to the 1451 MacDonald rebellion opens a new avenue; the origins of MacDonald-Gordon rivalry.¹⁰⁴ Rather than the king deploying the 1st Earl of Huntly against John MacDonald in 1451, MacDougall argued that he was simply giving a formal 'nod of approval' to Gordon actions in a conflict for control of the central Highlands that dated back to at least 1431 and which played out in Gordon action as royal agents following the forfeiture of Ross in 1475.¹⁰⁵ In what may have amounted to recognition that 'my enemy's enemy is my friend', the king appears to have been willing to concede control of land, royal castles and titles in Badenoch to the Gordons to use them as a barrier to MacDonald expansion into the same district. The principal motive on John MacDonald's part in the political conflicts first between James II and the Livingstones and then between the king and the Douglasses, MacDougall argues, was an effort to consolidate his hold on Ross. The attempted expansion in the Great Glen and Badenoch areas was designed to protect his position in the earldom and his regular presence at Dingwall and Inverness rather than in the Hebridean heartlands of the Lordship indicating that the earldom was his primary concern at this time. That James II was in no position to eject John from his gains in the 1450s leads him to conclude that the young 4th Lord must at this stage be considered a success.¹⁰⁶

At this point in the argument, however, MacDougall turns John's focus on Ross from a positive into a negative. Raising first the question of the degree to which his and his father's diversion of their main efforts towards controlling their earldom led to a waning of their personal authority within their ancestral heartlands – where local chieftains looked to alternative figures within the wider MacDonald kindred to provide dynamic leadership – he proposes that the assumption of that leadership role by his kinsmen resulted in the longer term in a deterioration in crown-MacDonald relations. With John expending

103 Ibid, 251.

104 Ibid, 252–253.

105 Ibid, 260–261.

106 Ibid, 255.

his energies on Ross, his cousin Donald Balloch, lord of Dunyvaig on Islay and the Glens of Antrim in Ulster, was left to pursue an aggressive course in support of the Douglasses, mounting a destructive raid on Stewart interests around the Firth of Clyde in 1454. Donald continued to direct MacDonald policy in the Isles and in 1461–2 it was he who in MacDougall's view provided the driving force behind the negotiations that led to the so-called treaty of Westminster-Ardtornish with Edward IV of England. Through this period and down to the early 1470s, while Donald Balloch and his immediate family provided leadership in the Lordship proper, John was found almost entirely in Ross and Inverness, seeking to consolidate or extend his problematical heritage in the north-east. MacDougall posits the question that the MacDonalds by the 1460s were already a 'house divided' with Donald Balloch and his immediate kin challenging the position of John.¹⁰⁷ Through his focus on Ross, John had effectively yielded primacy in the Lordship proper to his more hawkish kinsman. He thereby created what MacDougall described as his Achilles' Heel, for despite John's efforts the MacDonalds' hold on Ross remained tenuous and the loss of the earldom threw him back onto the portion of his heritage in which he had neglected to maintain his personal authority.

It is MacDougall's contention that the settlement of 1476 by which John was received back into the king's peace and confirmed in possession of his ancestral lands in the Hebrides 'amounted to the real forfeiture of the Lordship of the Isles'.¹⁰⁸ His authority fatally undermined by his failure to resist James III's seizure of Ross and with his own kinsmen – including his designated heir, his illegitimate son Angus Óg – jostling for the social and political leadership of the whole MacDonald kindred, John became an almost powerless onlooker in the continuing dismemberment of his heritage. Even now Ross continued in MacDougall's view to be the source of continued MacDonald weakness and division, and the cause of further conflict with the crown as first Angus sought to recover the earldom through military action in the late 1480s, then following his assassination in 1489 his cousin Alexander of Lochalsh pursued a similar course. Through all of these events, John dithered in the background, vacillating between support for his nephew Alexander – who seems to have secured recognition from most of the chieftains as head of the kindred – and making gestures of loyalty towards the king. Such indecision and incapacity to provide strong leadership, MacDougall argues, convinced the men who controlled the government of the underage James IV that a full-scale intervention in the West was necessary, a course of action also urged by the leading crown loyalists in

107 Ibid, 257.

108 Ibid, 262.

the Isles.¹⁰⁹ The resulting forfeiture of 1493 was not, however, the decision of the energetic, teenage king as which it has so often been presented, for he did not take control of his own government for a further two years. Instead, MacDougall argues, it was the decision of his chancellor, the political maverick Archibald Douglas, 5th earl of Angus, who had succeeded in excluding temporarily the Campbells from any influence in government and who was intent on building up his own family's position and that of his Boyd allies in the Clyde estuary region at the expense of the Campbells and their associates. Forfeiture of John MacDonald gave Angus the device through which to advance that aim but, while the young James IV might have enthusiastically embraced his chancellor's scheme, in MacDougall's final analysis the king was as active an agent in promoting the decision as John had been in maintaining his own position.¹¹⁰

It is this last point that represents MacDougall's most significant departure from the traditional historiography. The reason for the collapse of the MacDonald empire, he argues, was that it had become too large to be controlled by any one individual, not because of the hostility of a succession of Stewart monarchs, and that its dissolution was accelerated by the succession of John MacDonald in 1449. He was, in most assessments, a 'minor who grew up into a weak man', incapable of asserting his headship over more aggressive members of his own family or of providing strong leadership against the hostile actions of powerful predatory neighbours like the Gordons.¹¹¹ Rather than 1493 representing the final step in a long Crown-MacDonald conflict, it was but a further twist in a still-unfolding conflict between magnate rivals for regional supremacy.

Historiographical fashion in the early 2000s has seen a move away from traditional teleological and primarily political narratives to more thematic explorations of Scotland's people and culture. 'Great men' histories punctuated with battles and feuds had little place in the modern, post-Devolution Scotland in which this new work was being produced. In the first of the early twenty-first-century overview histories of the nation, *The New Penguin History of Scotland from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, the Lordship received little mention in either its discussion of later medieval national and regional identities or of crown-magnate relations.¹¹² In a volume whose editors were acutely aware

109 Ibid, 264–265.

110 Ibid, 266.

111 Ibid, 275.

112 D. Ditchburn and A.J. MacDonald, 'Medieval Scotland, 1100–1560', in R.A. Houston and W.W. Knox (eds), *The New Penguin History of Scotland from the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (London, 2001), 96–181.

of how certain aspects of Scottish history – and also myth – have been central to the forming of national identity while others have been for various reasons omitted, there is some irony in the manner in which the historical perception of cultural difference in medieval Scotland is treated.¹¹³

More recently, discussion of the historical context for the (re-)emergence of the Lordship as a major power in the fourteenth century has returned to the focus on its place in the wider political development of the Scottish kingdom that had largely characterised the historiography of the 1960s and 1970s. Michael Brown's exploration of the rise of the MacDonalds between 1286 and the 1350s works on the premise that the rivals for power in the west Highlands and Islands were magnates within the realm, albeit ones whose territories had 'retained their own traditions and identities' and who regarded themselves as heirs to a kingship rather than simply lords under the suzerainty of a higher authority.¹¹⁴ There are echoes of an older historiographical tradition in his vision of the Lords of the Isles moving in the interstices between the power blocs of the English and Scottish crowns and capitalising on the latitude for independent action which that position gave. He makes, however, an important distinction; that the Islesmen were not simply reacting to the countervailing impulses of Anglo-Scottish policies but were the most active agents in the reconfiguration of the region's political structures. For Brown, the critical point of departure came with the death of Alexander III. His personal investment in extending his lordship over the Isles had begun the process of integrating the political structures of the region into his kingdom, a process that was advanced further through the social and political bonds forged between mainland Scottish nobles and their west Highland and Hebridean counterparts. The impetus towards integration, however, stalled after the king's death and the events of the next generation revealed how shallowly-rooted the bonds between the Scottish political community and the Hebridean magnates were.

Whilst Brown's presentation of the position of the Lordship of the Isles vis à vis the Scottish kingdom offers many new insights on its political development and cultural base it is in many ways still a very traditional discussion that juxtaposes two essentially different cultures. By the time of its publication, other scholars were offering a subtly different analysis which reflected not just new scholarship but a changing dynamic within modern Scotland and the British Isles more generally. Perhaps the most significant of these new works was Simon Kingston's exploration of *Ulster and the Isles in the*

113 R.A. Houston and W.W. Knox, 'Introduction: Scots and their Histories', in Houston and Knox (eds), *New Penguin History of Scotland*, xiv.

114 M. Brown, *Wars of Scotland, 1214–1371* (Edinburgh, 2004), chapter 12, quote on 255.

Fifteenth Century, which sought to explain the power of the MacDonalds in terms of a cultural/political continuum that extended from the Isles into the Irish mainland.¹¹⁵ Although perhaps not quite as revolutionary in its methodology as its author claimed, it nevertheless represented the extension into the world of the Gaelic west of the methodologies of the New British History and, more particularly, of its non-Anglocentric dimension. Its importance was compounded by the stress that Kingston places on the need to examine MacDonald power across the theoretical political Anglo-Scottish or Scoto-Irish division that has been the traditional approach to histories of the Lordship and its place amongst the polities occupying the British Isles in the later Middle Ages. It is a sobering reflection on the nature of Scottish historiography from either a Highland or a Lowland perspective that Kingston's work was the first large-scale study to break out of a hermetically-sealed Scotland-centred bubble to analyse the ebbs and flows of the political power-play across the North Channel. This approach was made possible by a shift from a focus centred on the political entities that were the MacDonald lordships in the Isles and Antrim to the individuals who controlled these territories. From that perspective, individuals like John Mor, Donald Balloch and Alasdair Carrach cease to be men with only an episodic interest in the Scottish political scene to become figures of international significance whose periodic appearance and disappearance from the affairs of the Isles reflected their participation in greater games that demanded their personal presence. The cultural context for their activities and the mentalities surrounding lordship and the exercise of power arising from that cultural context form a vital part of Kingston's exploration of the shifting balances within the MacDonald lordship. In his exploration of *tigearnais* and the responsibilities and perquisites of lordship represented within that shifting concept in the fifteenth century, Kingston provides a cogent thesis which explains the changing balances of power within the Clan Donald domain between the descendants of John I.

Just as Kingston was arguing for closer integration of the Ulster and Hebridean world in a greater Gaelic cultural and political zone, so Wilson McLeod was producing a reappraisal of the evidence for a single Gaelic cultural province that bestrode the North Channel.¹¹⁶ Redolent with the language of core-periphery relations (with Ireland as the core and the Scottish

115 S. Kingston, *Ulster and the Isles in the Fifteenth Century: the Lordship of Clann Domhnaill of Antrim* (Dublin, 2004).

116 W. McLeod, *Divided Gaels: Gaelic Cultural Identities in Scotland and Ireland, c.1200–c.1650* (Oxford, 2004).

Gaidhealtachd as periphery) and of cultural collision and estrangement (between the Scottish Gaidhealtachd and what he terms the *Galldachd* of Anglophone Lowland Scotland), McLeod's analysis has echoes on a grand scale of Bannerman's 1970s exploration of the Gaelic cultural province within Scotland. Like Bannerman's earlier work, the focus is on the world constructed in the often introspective vision of the Gaelic intellectual elite – a veritable Gaidhealtachd of the mind – whose construction established boundaries that were perhaps far removed from the realities of either the mass of ordinary inhabitants of the Gaelic-speaking territories or of their social and political leaders who moved relatively easily between cultures.

The sudden efflorescence of new histories of Scotland that appeared in the early years after the Millennium was not simply a marking of that chronological milestone; it betokened the first appearance of a new historiography for the post-1997 political prescription and the conscious projection of a single national identity that arose from that. Christopher Harvie's 2002 *Scotland: A Short History*, almost expunged all reference to the Highland-Lowland divide of the traditional literature. Reference to the Lords of the Isles was limited to an observation on the jurisdictional powers of the Scottish nobility in general which he illustrated with the MacDonalds' use of such jurisdiction to conduct themselves in the fifteenth century 'almost as sovereigns'.¹¹⁷ In Murray Pittock's 2003 *A New History of Scotland*, the deconstruction of the nineteenth-century vision of the opposition of a Germanic Lowland culture and a Celtic Highland one exposed to a non-academic readership the manner in which that thesis had been used as building-block of Unionism.¹¹⁸ Pittock's brief overview of medieval Scottish culture emphasised its hybridity and the central place that the Gaelic element within it held in the minds of the Lowland intellectual elite despite what he acknowledged was a growing 'anti-Highland prejudice' from the later fourteenth century. His interpretation is a masterpiece in the new emphasis on cultural accommodation and inclusiveness that has become a hallmark of political and social consensus in post-Devolution Scotland. Instead of the traditional catalogue of conflicts, he concentrates on stressing the centrality of the Gaidhealtachd to learned understanding of Scottish identity right up to the eighteenth century, rather than on the estrangement of Gaelic and Lowland cultures that occurred on a more popular level.¹¹⁹ In the climate of 'One Scotland: Many Cultures' in which Pittock was writing, as a device of almost limitless potential for alternative explanations of cultural difference

117 C. Harvie, *Scotland: A Short History* (Oxford, 2002), 64.

118 M. Pittock, *A New History of Scotland* (Stroud, 2003), 98–101.

119 Ibid, 100.

or political power relationships at a national level, the Lordship of the Isles has found a new appeal. After almost two centuries of historiographical evolution, the vision of polar opposites that Tytler and his successors had presented in terms of racially-based incompatibilities and mutually incomprehensible cultures had transmogrified from vice to virtue; diversity, difference and social or political pluralism as manifested in the medieval Lordship and its relationship with the rest of Scotland has become a lens through which to view the modern nation's condition.

Between a Rock and a Hard Place

Climate, Weather and the Rise of the Lordship of the Isles

Richard D. Oram

The fact of a MacDonald 'rise' and the seemingly inexorable spread of their power out of the southern Hebrides in the fourteenth century is a central theme in much Scottish historical writing of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Until the 2000s, that narrative of the rise and fall of the Lordship of the Isles was presented as an almost exclusively political phenomenon and often stridently deterministic in associating the processes with the socio-political dislocations and governmental discontinuities that arose from the Wars of Independence, often coloured by inter- and infra-dynastic rivalries. It is a narrative, moreover, that is dominated by instances of opportunity and opportunism, where able and ambitious individuals could manoeuvre in the liminal zones between polities in crisis to construct personal empires. More recent discussion of the spread of MacDonald power and the territorial extension of their domain and the powerbases of the principal kindreds associated with them has turned towards exploration of environmental factors which might have stimulated that spread.¹ In particular, new emphasis is being placed on the changes in weather patterns which came with the end of the long period of climatic amelioration and more benign weather now known by climatologists as the Medieval Climate Anomaly that had prevailed across the North Atlantic region since the ninth century. The argument is not that changing environmental conditions caused the rise of the Lordship of the Isles but that they contributed to a range of socio-economic opportunities, pressures and threats which enabled the expansion to occur. Nor is it argued to have been a quick development in response to any single event, no matter how extreme, but to have arisen through a gradual change in the conditions which had prevailed down to the later thirteenth century.

1 See, for example, R. Oram and P. Adderley, 'Lordship and environmental change in central Highland Scotland c.1300–c.1450', *Journal of the North Atlantic*, 1 (2008), 74–84; R. Oram and P. Adderley, 'Lordship, land and environmental change in West Highland and Hebridean Scotland c.1300–c.1450' in S. Cavaciocchi (ed.), *Economic and Biological interactions in Pre-Industrial Europe from the 13th to the 18th Centuries* (Florence, 2010), 257–268; R. Oram and P. Adderley, 'Re Innse Gall: A Norse Colony in the Irish Sea and Hebrides?', in S. Imsen (ed.), *The Norwegian Domination and the Norse World c.1100–c.1400* (Trondheim, 2010), 125–148.

Traditional historical approaches to research into the socio-economic fabric of medieval Hebridean life and to the climatic/environmental factors that affected it are handicapped by the paucity of surviving contemporary and indigenous documentary records. With the exception of the extensive corpus of church-related material preserved mainly in the Vatican archives and the surviving charters issued by the Lords of the Isles in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries,² the majority of written sources concerned with the Western Isles were produced externally, some in mainland – principally lowland – Scotland, but the bulk in Ireland. The absence of significant documentary records is offset by the availability of proxy environmental measures which can provide a long-term perspective on past climate trends. Advances in understanding of the medieval North Atlantic climate are a happy consequence of late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century research into contemporary climate change, much of it focused on the northern North Atlantic periphery and Greenland in particular. Using a variety of different proxies including ice-core, ocean sediment and tree-ring data, climatologists have reconstructed a series of records that illustrate weather patterns around the region down to decadal and in some cases annual scale, and from these can model the more general climatic and oceanic trends that produced those weather patterns. In their fine-grained detail, these data are region-specific; nevertheless a synthesis of different data can be used to illustrate likely climatic changes across wider regions and longer chronologies. There is a further caveat that few of these proxies are ‘native’ to the Hebrides; the closest data in regional terms is the benthic foraminiferal oxygen isotope sequence from Loch Sunart,³ followed by the Irish oak tree-ring series. This near absence of regionally-specific data makes it imperative that multiple proxies are synthesised to produce a nuanced model that allows for such factors as the buffering of long-term climatic shifts in the Western Isles by the tempering effect of its oceanic regime. The model should also recognise that year-on-year seasonal differences i.e. summer *vs.* winter are known to have had a significant impact on landscape management in other places around the North Atlantic periphery.⁴ Variation of this type, evidenced from historical

2 Collected and published as *Acts of the Lords of the Isles*, eds R.W. Munro and J. Munro (Scottish History Society, 1986).

3 A.G. Cage and W.E.N. Austin, ‘Marine climate variability during the last millennium: the Loch Sunart record, Scotland, UK’, *Quaternary Science Reviews*, 29 (2010), 1633–1647.

4 W.P. Adderley and I.A. Simpson, ‘Soils and Palaeo-climate based evidence for irrigation requirements in Norse Greenland’, *Journal of Archaeological Science*, 33 (2006), 1666–1679;

data, has been considered in studies of upland or marginal areas of mainland Britain,⁵ but it has only been applied in a limited way in past studies of the Hebridean experience.

For the high and late medieval periods, roughly 1000–1500, some climatic proxies with a wide geographic distribution across the northern hemisphere have been brought to annual or seasonal resolution that can be correlated with documented observations by contemporary writers. By contrasting Northern Hemisphere/North Atlantic summer temperatures from dendrochronological analyses, stable isotope records providing an index of relative winter ‘severity’⁶ from Greenland ice core data against an annualised long-multi-proxy mean, it is clear from the annualised data that after an extended episode of relative stability and high annual mean temperatures through the Medieval Climate Anomaly (MCA), there was a marked decline into colder northern hemisphere temperatures from shortly before 1300.⁷ Although we must treat with considerable caution summer and winter temperature indicators based on regionally remote proxy data, there is a clear co-incidence between those proxies and the accounts preserved in contemporary documentary records of higher summer and winter temperatures through the tenth to thirteenth centuries, punctuated by brief cold episodes, changing dramatically to a sustained period of reduced winter and summer temperatures from 1300 for around 30 years. Taken together, this evidence suggests that after a long period of relative stability extending through the thirteenth century, an abrupt and continuous cold period may have been experienced across the North Atlantic through the fourteenth and into the fifteenth century, with the fifteenth century in particular being marked by an almost continuous downward trend from the 1410s through to the 1490s.⁸ There are further nuances to be added to the discussion. The first

W.P. Adderley and I.A. Simpson, ‘Early-Norse home-field productivity in the Faeroe Islands’, *Human Ecology*, 33 (2005), 711–736; I.A. Simpson, W.P. Adderley, G. Guðmundsson, M. Hallsdóttir, M. Sigurgeirsson and M. Snæsdóttir, ‘Soil limitations to agrarian land production in pre-modern Iceland’, *Human Ecology*, 30 (2002), 423–443.

5 M.L. Parry, ‘The impact of climatic variations on agricultural margins’, in R.W. Kates, J.H. Ausubel and M. Berberian, (eds.) *Climate Impact Assessment* (Chichester, 1985), 351–367; R. Tipping, ‘Cereal cultivation on the Anglo-Scottish Border during the “Little Ice Age”’, in C.M. Mills and G. Coles (eds.), *Life on the Edge: Human Settlement and Marginality* (Oxford, 1998), 1–12.

6 See Adderley and Simpson, ‘Soils’.

7 See Oram and Adderley, ‘Lordship, land and environmental change’; Oram and Adderley, ‘Ri Innse Gall’.

8 For discussion see Oram and Adderley, ‘Lordship and environmental change’, 77 and Fig 2. For bottom water temperature anomalies across this period, see Cage and Wen, ‘Marine climate variability’, 1641 Figure 7.

is that neither the generally warmer conditions experienced through the MCA nor the colder conditions that heralded the onset of what is often labelled 'the little ice age' should be regarded as characterised by unbroken stability in prevailing conditions. For example, a spike in the concentration of volcanic sulphates contained in Greenland ice cores from the later 1250s, representing material that fell in solution with atmospheric moisture as snow, indicates that immense quantities of volcanic material from a massive eruption of Gunung Rinjani on the island of Lombok in Indonesia were circulating in the high atmosphere at this time; a consequence of this phenomenon was perhaps a cooling of the climate as the particulate matter reflected solar energy back into space. In human experience terms, annal and chronicle sources from Britain and Ireland indicate that the 1250s started as a decade of dramatic fluctuations, from summers of high rainfall to ones of extended drought, coupled with winters of intense coldness and storminess.⁹ Abrupt change came from around 1256 – the year before the Rinjani eruption – when some chronicles report 'great corruption of the air and inundation of rain',¹⁰ but the sulphate levels present in the Greenland ice cores indicate that the real switch came in 1258. In Greenland itself, this coincided with winters of extreme severity and the expansion of ice around the coasts, recorded in both the depth of the ice layers representing snowfall at that time and in the saga record. To the south and on the opposite side of the Atlantic in Scotland, this change was reflected in accounts of crop failures and cold, wet and unusually stormy weather.¹¹ The effects of this change lasted for around a decade until a new switch saw a run of conditions associated with summer and winter high pressure systems prevailing in the north-east/Scandinavian region of the Atlantic.

A second nuance is that the prevailing trends were punctuated by shorter episodes of extreme weather; high rainfall, droughts, storms. An episode of such extreme events has already been noticed in the 1250s, but the late 1260s and early 1270s brought severe windstorms which produced surge tides and coastal inundations.¹² Runs of poor years continued through the 1280s and 1290s, but it was in the fourteenth century that the events became of longer duration and occurred with greater frequency, the 1310–25 period and the 1370s being especially noteworthy.¹³ The Greenland ice core evidence and

9 See, for example, *ALC* 1251.12, 1252.9, 1252.0; *Chron Lanercost*, s.a. 1252.

10 *Chron Lanercost*, s.a. 1256.

11 Bower, *Scotichronicon*, vol 5, 325.

12 See, for example, Bower, *Scotichronicon*, vol 5, [1267/1272]; *AI* 1269.2, 1272.2.

13 See, for example, *ACon* 1315.19, 1317.11, 1373.7; *Chron Lanercost*, s.a. 1316; Bower, *Scotichronicon*, vol 7 [1321–2, 1372]; *AU* 1373.6; *ALC* 1373.5.

documentary records, however, indicate that it was the period after 1400 that was marked most by a rapidly increasing frequency in patterns of North Atlantic storminess.¹⁴ Those extreme weather episodes, as will be discussed later, may have marked tipping points that signalled a decisive shift into a longer term trend.

All our records – climate proxies and written sources – indicate that deteriorating weather conditions afflicted most regions of north-western Europe from the 1250s onwards. While some of the most extreme events were experienced across the whole of northern and western Europe, such as the prolonged rainfall and crop failures of the 1310s which manifested themselves in what modern historians have labelled ‘The Great Famine’,¹⁵ the most severe and long-lasting effects were felt in more marginal zones from Greenland and Iceland to the western maritime districts of the British Isles. While individuals may have paid more immediate attention to and remembered short episodes of extreme weather, however, it is likely that the cumulative effects of the long period of warming over the MCA followed by the rapid cooling into the start of ‘the little ice age’ delivered more pronounced general results than short, year-to-year variations. Storms, floods or heat-waves might produce spectacular and immediately visible effects but cumulative change brought more subtle results that might only have been observable at the decadal level. In effect, the first phase – the MCA – had produced an amelioration of climate manifest in longer growing seasons, milder winters, better yields and optimal livestock rearing conditions. It also was marked by a lower incidence of storm events sweeping east across the Atlantic to threaten low-lying and exposed island districts. It was those conditions which encouraged and facilitated the settlement of Iceland from the late ninth century and Greenland in the tenth century and which encouraged Scandinavian settlement in the Outer Hebrides. The onset of less favourable conditions at the end of the thirteenth century delivered the failure of the Greenland colony,¹⁶ the near collapse of Iceland, and profound socio-economic changes in the Hebridean heartland of the Lordship of the Isles.

How was that shift experienced locally to the Hebrides? It must be stressed again at the outset of this discussion that there is no authentic local or

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- 14 P.A. Mayeski et al, ‘Holocene climate variability’, *Quaternary research* 62 (2004), 243–255 at 251–252.
 - 15 The most detailed and comprehensive study of this event remains W.C. Jordan, *The Great Famine: Northern Europe in the Early Fourteenth Century* (Princeton, 1996).
 - 16 A. Dugmore and others, ‘Norse Greenland settlement and limits to production’, in W.N. Adger, I. Lorenzoni and K. O’Brien, (eds), *Adapting to Climate Change: Thresholds, Values, Governance* (Cambridge, 2009), 96–113.

contemporary 'voice' to illustrate how the climatic trends and weather events revealed through the climate proxies were perceived by and affected the human population of the Western Isles across the era of the Lordship. With the exception of the Man-centric *Cronicon Regum Manniae et Insularum*, which from the mid-thirteenth century onwards ceases to display any knowledge of or concern with conditions in the Hebrides, there is no surviving narrative account with an Isles-based perspective. It is, however, not an entirely blank parchment, for as we have already seen we are fortunate that there is an extensive sequence of weather observations fossilised in a series of northern and western Irish annal sources, much of which can be corroborated through cross-reference with the surviving mainland Scottish and northern English chronicle accounts. The major Irish sources are the Annals of Ulster, the Annals of Connacht, the Annals of Innisfallen and the Annals of Loch Cé, and the later compilations from earlier – including some otherwise lost – sources known as the Annals of the Four Masters and Mac Carthaigh's Book. For Scotland, the principal sources are the Chronicle of Melrose, the southern Scottish and northern English based Chronicle of Lanercost, the Gesta Annalia II section of the chronicle attributed to John of Fordun which contains a body of material from otherwise lost thirteenth- and earlier fourteenth-century accounts, the early fifteenth century Scotichronicon of Walter Bower, Andrew of Wyntoun's Oryginal Cronykil, and the mid-fifteenth century Auchinleck Chronicle. To these can be added Hector Boece's early sixteenth century Latin history of the Scots, which contains a significant body of evidence from earlier sources that appears to be represented in no other surviving chronicles, and the incidental details that enliven the pages of the extensive clan histories that were being committed to writing from the sixteenth century onwards. Taken together, this material collated and composed at geographically widely dispersed locations provides a richly-textured record of the impact of climate change on the landscape, environment and people of the Hebrides across the quarter millennium after 1250.

The years 1270–1272, identified above as marked by episodes of weather extremes, provide a good illustration of the degree of correlation between records of weather trends in western Irish and northern mainland British sources. The Annals of Loch Cé [ALC] record that at the start of the period there was 'great famine and scarcity in all Erinn', corroborated by the Annals of Connacht [AC], which speak of 'hunger and great destitution throughout Ireland'.¹⁷ In Scotland, Bower drew on a now lost late thirteenth-century

17 ALC 1270.6; ACon 1270.14.

chronicle to report that ‘there was a great dearth and much rain for the whole of that year’:¹⁸ weather conditions and their impact on agricultural yields were here being clearly linked. The poor conditions continued into 1271, when the *Annals of Innisfallen* [AI] recorded ‘a heavy fall of snow about the Epiphany [January 6]’.¹⁹ Winter snow might seem an unremarkable phenomenon, but what the Innisfallen chronicler was noting was the particularity of the event, its unwonted heaviness. This event is probably matched by the Scottish Melrose chronicle’s reference to the severity and coldness of that same winter.²⁰ The most striking correspondence, however, occurs in 1272 when AI reported:

very bad weather in that year...And there was a great famine in the same year so that multitudes of poor people died of cold and hunger and the rich suffered hardship.²¹

Bower’s lost thirteenth-century Scottish source recorded almost identical events in somewhat greater detail, reporting how:

...there was a great lack of productivity on the land and unfruitfulness at sea, as well as turbulence of the air, as a result of which many people fell ill and many animals died. On the Saturday of Epiphany week [9 Jan] at about midnight a strong north wind, suddenly rushing down and bringing hail, overturned houses, smothered those sleeping within and flattened high buildings. And fire rising from the vehemence of the storm burnt the church of Arbroath and many others. A great famine hit France, England, Scotland and many areas, for the cattle mostly died, crops failed, and the poor died of their poverty.²²

What these accounts reflect appears first to be a southwards displacement of the Jet Stream which resulted in the tracking of a series of summer low pressure cells across the northern part of the British Isles bringing a succession of cold fronts in from the Atlantic to deposit waves of rainfall that under ‘normal’ conditions would have passed over the region between Britain and Iceland. The winter 1271 accounts correspond with the collision of static winter high pressure over southern Scandinavia, which drew cold air west from Siberia,

18 Bower, *Scotichronicon*, vol 5, 381.

19 AI 1271.2.

20 *Chron Melrose*, s.a. 1271.

21 AI 1272.2.

22 Bower, *Scotichronicon*, vol 5, 385.

with warm, moist air delivered by the low pressure systems tracking east across the Atlantic. The result of this was prolonged and heavy snowfall across the whole of the northern British Isles and, depending on the western reach of the high pressure cell, much of Ireland also. It was exactly these kinds of conditions that resulted in the extreme winters of 2009–10, 2010–11 and 2012–13.

Reports of extreme wind events, such as the westerly gales recorded in the Lanercost chronicle in 1292 as causing storm surges on the Solway coast of Cumberland,²³ or the northerlies which Bower mentions in 1267, 1272, 1293, 1356 and 1372 as bringing devastation to woodland and buildings across Scotland,²⁴ illustrate the exposure of the north-western parts of the British Isles to Atlantic storms and the nature of the associated risks most obvious to the medieval population; marine transgression of low-lying coastal districts and wind-damage to structures and woods. It is from the later 1390s onwards, however, that the frequency of the storms and the scale of the associated losses increase in the written record. In the early seventeenth-century compilation of earlier sources known as MacCarthaigh's Book, there is an entry noted in 1397 that there was 'insufficiency of food in the summer, and the autumn wet, windy, destructive, and cold'.²⁵ This poor year appears to have been a foretaste of what was to come, the same source recording in 1405 that there was 'very tempestuous weather and very heavy rainfall this winter, causing much destruction' and in 1407 that there was again 'very tempestuous weather' but in that year accompanied by the deaths of large numbers of cattle.²⁶ The events of this last year are corroborated in similar language in the contemporary Annals of Loch Cé.²⁷ In Scotland, Bower personally experienced the extreme winter of 1409/10, during which:

on St Kentigern's Day [13 Jan] there was a gale-force wind; by the violence of this storm woodland trees were torn up by the roots, houses and churches were demolished, ships and boats were sunk. It also blew down the south gable of the great monastic church of St Andrews: in its violence large stones tumbled down and penetrated the dormitory [the eastern vaulting of the parlour, and] also the chapter-house underneath....²⁸

23 *Chronicon de Lanercost*, s.a. 1292.

24 Bower, *Scotichronicon*, vol 5, 359, 361, 385; vol 6, 41; vol 7, 289, 291, 375.

25 *MCB* 1397.5.

26 *MCB* 1405.27, 1407.2.

27 *ALC* 1407.17.

28 Bower, *Scotichronicon*, vol 8, 75.

These sources provide a broad picture of the devastating impact of this mounting storminess across the north and west of the British Isles in general, but amongst them we can also catch glimpses of how the Atlantic seaboard region was affected directly. In 1413, for example, the Annals of Ulster record how the mercenary leader Tuathal ua Maille was returning to his home territory on the west mainland of Ireland from Ulster with seven shiploads of men when they were struck by a westerly gale. The storm, the annalist recorded, drove the vessels northwards towards Scotland where most were wrecked with great loss of life.²⁹ For a maritime people like the Gaels of western Ireland and Scotland, storms and shipwrecks were a fact of life in their sea-faring existence, but experience built up over the centuries enabled them to mitigate the worst risks. In the early 1400s, however, it seems that the weather was throwing up new and unpredictable threats with a growing frequency.

What was driving this change? The principal motor appears to have been a pronounced switch in atmospheric circulation across the northern hemisphere generally. Between the mid-1370s and the late 1390s, there was a two-decade phase during which atmospheric circulation was generally slack, marked in the documentary record by an absence of references to the type of extreme weather events that characterised the early 1370s. Greenland ice core and Icelandic record evidence, however, indicate that in the 1400s a new seasonal pattern became established and deeply entrenched. One dimension of this was that the winter low-pressure cell that generally forms close to Iceland became much deeper, resulting in stormier weather drawing in waves of moisture-laden air from the Atlantic, while high-pressure cells became more prominent over the adjoining continental landmasses. It was the collision of the cold easterly air flow from Siberia with the moist westerly systems from the Atlantic that delivered the extreme winter storms and snowfall across mainland Scotland at this time. Further west, the pulses of wet and windy weather drawn eastward by the Iceland low-pressure cell meant that winter storms down the Atlantic seaboard became not only more frequent but were also longer lasting and more violent. As this atmospheric circulation pattern became more entrenched it produced changes in oceanic circulation, in particular drawing cold, polar water further south. While this phenomenon would not have brought the extension of sea-ice to Hebridean waters that helped to finally close off Greenland from communication with Europe, it did change oceanic currents that influenced everything from migration of pelagic fish species to favoured navigation routes for trade around the northern and western fringes of the British Isles. Most notably, however, it resulted in a southwards

29 AU 1413.5.

displacement of the North Atlantic storm track. In the 1310s, the summer-time displacement of that track had brought seemingly unceasing rainfall; in the 1400s it brought pulse after pulse of winter storms.

Within the Hebrides, the effects of these westerly weather systems and winter storms would have been felt differently in different parts of the inner and outer archipelagos. While the island group as a whole is exposed to every episode of Atlantic storminess, low-lying areas like the *machair* that fringes the west coasts of the Outer Hebrides, and the sandy islands of Coll, Tiree, Colonsay and Oronsay were particularly susceptible to weather damage. There is, for example, a growing body of geomorphological, oceanographic and hydrodynamic research which explores how the Atlantic coast of Lewis and Harris, the Uists and Barra has responded to sea-level changes and to the battering by weather-systems moving eastwards across the ocean which they have experienced throughout their existence. Studies in the early 2010s have identified the presence of a series of barrier islands extending down this coast forming a shifting land/seascape that protects the main islands behind them from the regular impact of Atlantic wave-power but has also revealed how breaches made in extreme episodes were followed by catastrophic wave surges and erosion impacts on the leeward islands.³⁰ Erosion and re-deposition of the western coasts of the Outer Hebrides has been a perennial experience, exacerbated by the rises in sea-level which have occurred across the Holocene which have seen the loss of extensive low-lying districts that once stretched to the west of the current island chain. There have been successive episodes of sand drift affecting the calcareous shell-sand machair districts, in some phases occurring over periods of several hundred years and extending back to 13,700 BP.³¹ The most recent of these episodes spanned the period 600–200 BP, approximately AD 1350–1750 in calendar years, an era that coincides with some of the most extreme events of Atlantic storminess. Within that historical period, the human costs of extreme episodes of catastrophic dune drift have been recorded, starting with accounts given by Archdeacon Monro in his 1549 description of the Western Isles, where he reported the erosion of the land that separated the freshwater Loch Bee in South Uist from the Atlantic and the

30 A.G. Dawson et al, 'Barrier Island Geomorphology, Hydrodynamic Modelling, and Historical Shoreline Changes: An Example from South Uist and Benbecula, Scottish Outer Hebrides', *Journal of Coastal Research* 28.6 (2012), 1462–1476.

31 D.D. Gilbertson and others, 'Sand-drift and Soil Formation Along an Exposed North Atlantic Coastline: 14,000 Years of Diverse Geomorphological, Climatic and Human Impacts', *Journal of Archaeological Science*, 26 (1999), 439–469.

resulting efforts to close the breach.³² Earlier episodes, however, have been revealed in archaeological and geoarchaeological excavation and survey work, most notably on the Aird a' Mhòrain peninsula on the north coast of North Uist, where excavations at the Udal and wider survey of the dune systems on Machair Leathann indicate that areas of earlier medieval agriculture and settlement were 'drowned' beneath deep layers – several metres thick in places – of wind-blown sand in the early 1400s.³³ In these episodes, we can see the consequences of both increased storminess and marine erosion, the two combining with devastating effect to overwhelm economic and political centres of power in the Uists in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.

Proxy climate data and the written record together present a narrative of protracted climate change and extreme weather events spread across most of the two centuries after c.1250. How, though, might that extended period of progressive change punctuated by sudden and dramatic episodes of rapid shift have affected the human population of the Western Isles? Answers to that question can be extrapolated from the archaeological record, but the interpretation of the archaeological evidence has often to be disaggregated from past efforts to fit it into a historical framework constructed from what amounts to little more than a series of headline incidents. Changes in the socio-economic structures of settlements, for example, have been interpreted by some archaeologists in terms of known political changes, such as the notional transfer of sovereignty in the Hebrides from the Norwegian to the Scottish crown by the 1266 Treaty of Perth, although historians have questioned how deeply that reassignment of overlordship would have penetrated into the consciousness of the ordinary inhabitants of the Isles and how rapidly any significantly noticeable material changes would have resulted. Only a handful of sites with a stratigraphy that spans the era under consideration have been excavated using modern sampling and recording techniques and fewer still have to date been published. At the time of writing, the largest and most significant excavation – that at the Udal in North Uist – is nearing final publication three decades after work there was completed, but evidence from six other sites in the Outer Hebrides reveals clear parallels with such data from the Udal as has appeared in interim reports.

32 *Monro's Western Isles*, 76.

33 For discussion of the context, see I Crawford, 'Structural Discontinuity and Associable Evidence for Settlement Disruption', *Settlement and Society in Scotland: Migration, Colonisation and Integration*, 2nd Symposium of the Association of Scottish Historical Studies (Glasgow, 1988), 1–34.

Amongst these other excavations, that of the prosaically-named Mound 3 at Bornais in South Uist is of major importance for illustrating the long-term impacts of environmental change on settlement and on socio-economic activity. The excavation of this machair site has revealed the essentially Scandinavian character of settlement and society in the Uists from the late 800s down into the fourteenth century,³⁴ and point to a long period of cultural continuity in the types of economic behaviour at that site across the MCA. When placed alongside data from excavations at Bostadh, Barvas, Cille Pheadair, Cnip, Drimore and Rosinish in Lewis, Harris and the Uists, and crucially alongside data from the nearby Late Atlantic Iron Age settlement of Dun Vulcan, the results from Bornais indicate a profound transformation in social organisation. That transformation is reflected most visibly in the replacement of the indigenous Late Atlantic Iron Age building styles by distinctly Scandinavian forms, but is clearest evident in a sharp reorientation in the fundamental basis of the agricultural economy. The abruptness of this change suggests a rapid replacement of established local traditions with something akin to the 'brown-foot/blue-foot' system (mixed maritime and terrestrial economy) which had evolved in western Norway and, ultimately, the Faeroe Islands and Iceland. A progressive transition from one suite of economic exploitative choices to another could have come about through indigenous, independent adaptation to environmental changes in the MCA, but, when combined with the evidence for a fundamental break in material culture, and the historical record of colonisation, we appear to have the physical evidence for the establishment in the Outer Isles at least of a Norse society as a replacement for the indigenous Celtic one.

What factors helped to make the Norse character of the settlements in the Isles such an enduring feature of at least the westernmost periphery of the region? The expanding body of archaeological and palaeoenvironmental evidence from settlement sites in the Outer Hebrides indicates the development of a suite of exploitation regimes close to those which had emerged in western Norway rather than, say, Denmark, by the later eighth century: the environment of the Isles and the resource-base which it delivered was, clearly, conducive to Norse settlement in the ninth and tenth centuries. In respect of the Northern Isles and Caithness, James Barrett and others have emphasised the evidence for an apparently abrupt and decisive shift in the nature of marine fish exploitation as an indicator of Scandinavian settlement and an attendant transformation of long-established indigenous cultural practices. While the exploitation of gadoid species, principally cod and hake, was indicated by

34 N. Sharples (ed.), *A Norse Farmstead in the Outer Hebrides: Excavations at Mound 3, Bornais, South Uist* (Oxford, 2005).

the presence of bone from these species in assemblages recovered from pre-Norse settlement sites in the Northern Isles and northern mainland Scotland, in sites of the late 800s and 900s cod bones especially are dominant in midden and processing deposits. Barrett has linked this transition – which is labelled ‘the cod horizon’ – to a transformation in the fishing technology that was available locally, both in terms of ship-building and actual fishing techniques. That shift, furthermore, is associated in his analysis with an equally radical change in the make-up of the population of these areas: diet, it is argued, was linked to technology and, through that, to ethnicity.³⁵ Barrett has, furthermore, proposed that there is a link between intensive fishing for cod and hake and the integration of the Caithness, Orkney and Shetland fisheries into the international trade in dried fish that had come to be dominated by Icelandic and northern Norwegian production centres by the thirteenth century.³⁶

Similar technological and, it seems likely, ethnological shifts in fishing practice have been identified in the excavated Norse-period sites in the Hebrides.³⁷ In the Outer Hebrides, however, the emphasis appears to have been on herring rather than the gadoids which dominated Northern Isles production, but this was probably an emphasis dictated by local availability of species, itself a consequence of oceanic circulation and both surface and bottom water temperatures, rather than any other reason. At Bornais, The Udal, Rosinish and Bostadh, Norse period middens contained a preponderance of bones from off-shore, often deep-water species, principally herring, in their assemblages. This weighting in the bone evidence is in marked contrast to the pattern in assemblages from middens at excavated pre-Norse sites in the Outer Isles. Significantly, amongst those excavated pre-Norse sites is Dun Vulan, which is located on the rocky headland of Rubha Ardvule that interrupts the 5km-long stretch of machair on this part of South Uist, only 1.8km from Bornais, where the excavated remains indicate that the fishing activities of its Late Iron Age inhabitants was limited to inshore and immediately coastal waters.³⁸ What

35 J.H. Barrett, R.P. Beukens and R.A. Nicholson, ‘Diet and ethnicity during the Viking colonisation of northern Scotland: evidence from fish bones and stable carbon isotopes’, *Antiquity* 75 (2001), 145–154; J. H. Barret, R.A. Nicholson and R. Céron-Carrasco, ‘Archaeo-ichthyological evidence for long-term socioeconomic trends in northern Scotland, 3500 BC to 1500 AD’, *Journal of Archaeological Science* 26 (1999), 353–388.

36 J.H. Barrett, ‘Fish trade in Norse Orkney and Caithness: a zooarchaeological approach’, *Antiquity* 71 (1997), 616–638.

37 C. Ingrem, ‘Fish’, in Sharples (ed.), *Bornais*, 192–194.

38 R. Céron-Carrasco and M. Parker Pearson, ‘The Fish Bones’, in M. Parker Pearson and N. Sharples (eds), *Between Land and Sea: Excavations at Dun Vulan, South Uist* (Sheffield, 1999), 274–281; Ingrem, ‘Fish’, 193.

this transition represents in cultural terms is a move away from inshore fishing from small boats in sheltered in-shore waters or perches on rocks rising from deeper water, to true deep-water exploitation. The sharpness of the dichotomy suggests that either the pre-Norse inhabitants of the Uists lacked the technology to fish in those deeper and more weather-exposed waters or were, it has been argued, unprepared to risk the perils of such activities in an ocean which, before the climatic amelioration that began to make itself manifest in the later ninth century, was wild and unpredictable. It is perhaps overly culturally deterministic to link this shift exclusively to the colonisation of the Western Isles by people noted for their maritime skills, but, coupled with the other evidence for cultural change in the region, that conclusion seems inescapable.

An equally sharp dichotomy between the Late Atlantic Iron Age population and the Norse incomers occurs in respect of evidence for arable farming practices and livestock management. One of the most marked changes was in respect of crops being grown, where there was intensification in the cultivation of hulled six-row barley, which had been already the favoured crop of the indigenous population, and of oats, probably favoured due to its resilience in the less-than-favourable local climatic conditions. Alongside these cereals, however, rye, which favours poor and dry soils, made a new appearance, possibly marking an overall expansion of the cultivated area into land which the Late Iron Age population had been unwilling to farm or considered incapable of exploiting productively. Such an expansion may have been driven by an overall rise in population levels, which demanded new sources for the supply of dietary staples, and facilitated by the same climatic amelioration which was making the off-shore fisheries accessible. Again in common with the expansion of the fishery into new waters and the exploitation of new species, more intensive cereal cultivation appears to have been accompanied by the introduction of new grain-drying technology, represented at Bornais by a corn-drying kiln and barn. These introductions argue for the presence of a population for whom arable farming was much more central to their culture than it had been for their Late Atlantic Iron Age predecessors. There is evidence, too, for the new introduction of other cultivated species which signal a major shift in cultural preferences and social behaviour. Amongst these is flax, which was a new component in the agricultural repertoire of the Hebrides. It was possibly being cultivated for its fibres for weaving into linen, which was an important fabric component in both Norse and later Hebridean costume, but it is perhaps more likely that it was its seeds that were in demand for pressing for flaxseed (the cold-pressed product) or linseed oil. Neither linen production nor the use of oil from flax seeds – for food purposes or in preparation and preservation of wood and other perishable materials – had featured in the culture repertoire

of the Western Isles before the arrival of the Norse. Like the other innovations in environmental resource exploitation that emerged in the later ninth century and prevailed into the fourteenth, the growing of flax appears to have been facilitated by the significantly improved climate of the MCA.

A further aspect of a sharp cleavage in approaches to maximisation of the exploitation of environmental resources to support a western Scandinavian style of rural economy in the region is in the profile of the livestock farmed and in the manner in which they were managed. One key change was towards intensification of the numbers of animals grazing on the available biomass. This rise in numbers is evident in the bone assemblages from the excavated sites, where there is also an apparent widening of the range of animals present: goat, for example, emerges in the late ninth and tenth centuries as a significant element in the stock profile. Sheep, too, appear to have become more significant to the regional economy. Although present in the pre-Norse period, evidence from excavated sites suggests that they were kept in relatively low numbers. Intensification of sheep-management perhaps reflects a growing importance for wool production rather than flocks being kept for dairy or meat exploitation. One of the most striking differences which emerges early in the MCA, however, is a change in the age profiles within the flocks and herds that are represented in the bone assemblages; there is a marked shift towards older ages at time of slaughter. This trend towards older animals may reflect a shift from a primarily dairying culture to one where the meat and skins were the more valued commodities. There is variation in the age profiles of the slaughtered animals, noticeable too across species, at the main excavated sites. The important point, however, is that these trends all mark a significant departure from the indigenous Late Atlantic Iron Age practices.

Climate conditions are the common factor in the development of all these economic sectors or agricultural exploitation regimes. In respect of marine exploitation, for example, the move into offshore and deeper water for fishing is not solely a technological issue, but also relates to sea conditions both in terms of migratory patterns of the fish stocks and in terms of storminess. The widening range of cultivated plants required particular climatic conditions alongside the right soil conditions and agrarian knowledge. Rye and flax, in particular, have quite specialist soil-condition, rainfall and temperature requirements. Finally, the higher numbers of animals that were being kept for longer requires a change in grazing practice and availability of fodder resources. More summer pasture producing an abundance of good-quality biomass is needed and, if outdoors winter pasturing had not been an option, more fodder for winter would have had to be grown, harvested and stored. In the absence of clear evidence for such fodder production, over-wintering out-of-doors may

have been an option, and that alone points to a milder winter climatic regime. Cumulatively, this evidence points to the successful implanting of a Norse culture into the Western Isles of Scotland during the MCA as wholly contingent upon the environmental conditions prevailing at the time of the colonisation.

What happened when those favourable environmental conditions ended? As documentary sources record, some of which was reviewed above, medieval rural societies dispersed around the North Atlantic operated at the margins of sustainability and relatively short-lived episodes of poor weather could be sufficient to tip them into crisis. Although overall these societies appear to have displayed a remarkable resilience in the face of the adversities which assailed them from the 1250s onwards, the records of successive episodes of widespread crop-failure, occasioned by drought or high rainfall, followed by famine, and of regular murrains amongst livestock, probably mask episodes of profound social dislocation and high mortality amongst the human population. For those living through such traumatic times, nutrition levels were often low and resulted in severe physiological effects that may have affected life expectancy and, for children of a famine generation, future working/fighting ability and levels of resistance to pathogens. Although we have little direct evidence for human suffering occasioned by such conditions, the excavations at Bornais have yielded physical evidence for an apparent collapse in the 1300s of the economic regime that had been established during the MCA and point to significant socio-economic change from the later fourteenth century.³⁹ Together with more limited evidence from Bostadh, Barvas, Cille Pheadair, Cnip, Drimore and Rosinish, the Bornais results reveal a seismic shift in social organisation reflected in the physical record of settlement forms and in the fundamental basis of the agricultural economy of the region. At all of these places there is a shift away from activities and sites located on the once-favoured *machair* to inland sites on the rockier and peat-covered 'blacklands'. In all cases, environmental change appears to be a common factor in the decision to move.

The cooling and wettening of the climate which became established in the fourteenth century had further profound effects on the cultural system that had prevailed in the Isles since the later ninth century. It was not the short bursts of extreme weather that pitched the socio-economic system from marginality into unsustainability but the year-on-year downward trend that may have taken the region's inhabitants decades to recognise. Long term, the weather and palaeoenvironmental records point to sustained climatic

39 Sharples (ed), *Bornais*, 195–197.

disturbance which perhaps saw the growing season in the worst affected parts of Scotland shortened by about a month.⁴⁰ For a society based on arable production, such a contraction would have seen a growing tendency for widespread crop failures and, potentially, the emergence of alternative – usually technological – strategies to ensure ripening or drying of the harvested crops. In regions like the Hebrides with a broader range of environmental resources available to buffer the potential shortfall of grain production, social responses might have been more subtle and diverse. It needs to be recognised, however, that all of the principal resource niches exploited in the islands into the fourteenth century were differently affected by the same processes of climate change but that all of the impacts were essentially negative. The established patterns and systems of crop production, livestock management and fishing were all dependent on the climate regime that had prevailed across the MCA. The ending of that anomalous episode of benign conditions might not have been fatal for Hebridean society in the manner it proved to be for Norse Greenland, but it required the people of Scotland's Atlantic seaboard to change their cultural organisation in profound ways.

Following the already seven-centuries-old intellectual tradition expounded in the *Etymologiae* of Isidore of Seville, the thirteenth-century Scottish *Gesta Annalia II* had emphasised how the landscapes of 'barbarous' and 'civilised' peoples mirrored or influenced their cultural state. It paraphrased Isidore's model in terms of a sharp contrast between the primarily cereal-producing arable lowlands occupied by prosperous and industrious law-abiding Scots and the less fertile uplands which were the abode of idle men, fractious and given to violence. *Gesta Annalia II* described the uplands as 'very hideous, interspersed with moors and marshy fields, muddy and dirty; it is however, full of pasturage grass for cattle, and comely with verdure in the glens, along the water-courses'.⁴¹ Although founded on an academic tradition that originated in the Late Antique Mediterranean world, its Scottish interpreter was focusing on what he regarded as the chief characteristic of the northern and western Scottish landscape, its preponderance of pasture as opposed to the arable character of the lowland districts. Taken out of the context of intentional stereotyping in the Isidorean tradition of cultural contrasts, such generalised descriptive accounts, when coupled with a modern perception of thinly-spread population based on post-Clearance levels, have helped to establish a notion of the Islands' relative insulation from the worst consequences of

40 I. Morrison, 'Climate' in M. Lynch (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Scottish History* (Oxford, 2001), 100.

41 *Chron Fordun*, 37.

fourteenth-century climate change. What this view neglects is that the climate affected all vegetation growth, not just cereal crops. While grass will still grow regardless of poor summer weather, the shortening of the growing season by around a month meant that growth on summer pastures in upland districts began later in May and ended earlier in September. Nor could rain-saturated pastures bear grazing across the whole of that shortened period, for pocking caused by hooves sinking into wet ground helped to break down the root-mat, adding to water-logging and increasing the threat of erosion. Consequently, it is possible that the summer pasturing of cattle at the traditional upland shieling locations was reduced to around four months in the year. Furthermore, the biomass produced was incapable of sustaining the numbers of animals that had been summered on these pastures during the MCA, this reduction in carrying capacity of the land leading either to malnourishment of the animals if there was no reduction in flock or herd size, over-grazing and further damage to the quality of the pasture, or an effort to find alternative grazing ranges. Coupled with this factor was the probable reduction in the altitudinal range of grazing, as the more extreme weather conditions lowered the altitude at which both crops could be grown and pastures exploited productively.⁴² The pressure, however, was not limited only to the higher altitude summer grazing, for the reduced growing season also had an impact on hay production in low-level meadows, diminishing supplies of winter fodder, while winter grazing generally was placed under great strain as herds had to be pastured on them for longer periods each year. It must be recognised, moreover, that it was the physical condition of the livestock as well as their feed-sources that were affected by the extreme weather. Sustained periods of high winds and rain, like those recorded in the sources in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, cause sheep and cattle to lose body-heat and use up calories in an attempt to compensate, thus preventing them from accumulating the body-mass wanted for meat-production or the fat reserves to aid them through the winter. Calorie consumption to maintain body-heat, moreover, also reduces production of milk needed both for feeding calves and lambs and also for making butter and

42 M.L. Parry, 'Secular climatic change and marginal agriculture', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 64 (1975), 5–11; R. Tipping, 'Cereal cultivation on the Anglo-Scottish Border during the "Little Ice Age"', in C. Mills and G. Coles (eds), *On The Edge – Human Settlement in Marginal Areas* (Oxford, 1998), 1–11; R. Tipping, 'Towards an environmental history of the Bowmont Valley and the northern Cheviot Hills', *Landscape History*, 20 (1999), 41–50; R. Tipping, 'Palaeoecology and political history: evaluating driving forces in historic landscape change in southern Scotland', in I.D. Whyte and A.J.L. Winchester, *Society, Landscape and Environment in Upland Britain* (2004), 11–20.

cheese. Some mitigation of these pressures may have been brought about by the long-lasting effects of the great cattle murrain that swept through the British Isles between 1318 and the 1320s, which has been estimated to have led to the loss of up to seventy-five per cent of the national herd in England and from which it took over a generation to recover.⁴³ Unfortunately, whilst there is abundant record evidence for its devastating impact in Gaelic Ireland,⁴⁴ there is no surviving account for its impact or even its presence in the Hebrides. Given the degree of communication between Highland and Hebridean Scotland and the lowland Scottish and Irish market centres where the murrain had first broken out in these countries, it is unlikely that the Western Isles escaped the panzootic unscathed. For a culture dependent primarily upon cattle, the consequences of a sustained period of climatic deterioration and livestock disease were as profound as for an arable-based society.

Cumulatively, the socio-economic system that supported the style of lordship that had become established in the Hebrides by the end of the thirteenth century, founded upon cattle, specialisation in machair-based cereal cultivation and offshore fishing, suffered multiple blows from the effects of climate change and disease. Economic response modelling of the impacts of deterioration in conditions for arable and fodder production for pre-modern Iceland suggest that prolonged periods of moderately poor growing seasons are more damaging than smaller numbers of more extreme climatic downturns;⁴⁵ and

43 T.P. Newfield, 'A cattle panzootic in early fourteenth-century Europe', *Agricultural History Review*, 71(2) (2009), 155–190; B.M.S. Campbell, 'Four famines and a pestilence: harvest, price and wage variations in England, 13th to 19th centuries', in B. Liljewall, I.A. Flygare, U. Lange, L. Junggren and J. Söderberg (eds), *Agrarhistoria på många sätt, 28 studies on manniskan och jorden. Festskrift till Janken Myrdal på hans 60-årsdag* (Stockholm, 2009), 23–56; B.M.S. Campbell, 'Physical Shocks, Biological Hazards and Human Impacts: The Crisis of the Fourteenth Century Revisited', in S. Cavaciocchi (ed), *Economic and Biological interactions in Pre-Industrial Europe from the 13th to the 18th Centuries* (Florence, 2010), 13–32.

44 See, for example, AU 1318.7 [recte 1321], 'Great cow destruction throughout all Ireland in general'; AI 1321.3, 'A great murrain of the cows of Ireland in the above year, and there was a great famine [...] in the same after year. LC 1321.4, 'A great cow-destruction throughout all Erin, the like of which was not known before' [also ACon 1321.5]. The murrain raged through into the middle of the decade. See, for example, LC 1324.3, 'The same cow-destruction in all Erin in hoc anno; and it was it that was usually called the Maeldomhnaigh'; ACon 1324.4, 'The same cattle-plague was in all Ireland this year. It was called the Mael Domnaig'; *U1322.5 [recte 1325], 'The same cow-destruction prevailed in Ireland again'; LC 1325.6, 'The cow-destruction still throughout Erin'.

45 McGovern et al, 'Landscapes of Settlement'.

that different responses may ensue. In the Isles the responses to deteriorating stock conditions may first have seen efforts to increase numbers to make up for shortfalls in volume of meat, hides and milk being produced, but it would have been evident quickly that all this strategy produced was more ill-nourished animals and possibly a higher mortality level amongst them. Indeed, during the 1320s, overstocking, malnourishment and the possible spread of the murrain through faeces dispersal by rain-water may have combined to worsen the impacts of the panzootic. It was perhaps from these circumstances that the strategy of calf-slaughter that is evident from later medieval bone assemblages and which is attested in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century documentary accounts was adopted.⁴⁶ A second response may have been reductions in souming levels, the estimates of carrying-capacity of the grazing, and increases in fines for those who breached those levels and so threatened the viability of the grazing and the livelihoods of their fellows.⁴⁷ Stock numbers consequently would have fallen, with the main impact falling at the lower end of the social spectrum where rent-payers became less capable of meeting their obligations to their superiors. For both the MacDonald lords and the kindred heads beneath them who maintained their social leadership on cattle rendered by their tenants, which they used also to support retinues of warriors, craftsmen and artists, and to project their status through lavish feasting, the fall in animals rendered as tribute or rent was potentially catastrophic. In the short term, the exchange system which sustained the ideology of behaviour and display which underpinned Hebridean lordship could off-set shortages through redistribution of resources received as renders from tenants.⁴⁸ Longer term, however, such redistribution was unsustainable as the renders were essential to secondary circuits of exchange, for example supporting the specialist craftsmen who supplied the elite with high-status items like weaponry, jewellery and sculpture, and in projecting the image of wealth and power of the lord through material and social display, including the maintenance of complex households. For Highland and Hebridean nobles, the choice was stark: either reduce expenditure on such activities and suffer the consequences of diminished prestige, or find alternative sources of income.

By the 1330s when the first highly visible and protracted episode of climatic deterioration at the end of the MCA had ended, the traditional lordship structures were already under severe economic pressure and the established mechanisms that supported the military retinues which are recognised as having

46 McCormick, 'Calf slaughter as a response to marginality'.

47 Ross, 'Scottish environmental history and the (mis)use of soums'.

48 Dodgshon, *From Chiefs to Landlords*, 14–15.

constituted the bedrock of MacDonald power were showing the signs of extreme stress. Falls in population associated first with the consequences of famine in the 1310s and 1320s and then as a result of the Black Death after 1349 may have lifted some of the pressures on food supply and the attendant pressure on the arable land and pasture. As with the cattle epizootic of the 1320s, there is no hard evidence for the mortality levels associated with the first outbreak of plague and its recurrences through the fourteenth and earlier fifteenth centuries. Indeed, there is only one source, the Icelandic *Lawman's Annal*, which records how 'pestilence visited the Shetland Islands, the Orkney Islands, the Hebrides and the Faroe Islands',⁴⁹ but it offers no comment on mortality levels in those areas or on how society coped locally with any losses. Temporary abandonment of high status settlement sites such as the Udal was in the past associated with plague mortality,⁵⁰ but more recent analysis of the wider landscape context of the site links the break in occupation there with episodes of increased dune erosion and sand-blow.⁵¹ What is unclear is if the abandonment of such sites was a consequence of the destabilisation of the adjoining machair upon which the local population depended for their agricultural needs, or if the sand-blow overwhelmed an already abandoned site that had been depopulated through plague deaths. Human plague mortality, therefore, needs to be added in to the mix of factors that combined to end the forms of social organisation and resource exploitation that had evolved in the areas of former Norse settlement in the Hebrides during the MCA. Elsewhere, such as at Cille Pheadair and Bornais, the decline and abandonment of the settlement in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries appears to be linked more clearly with fundamental changes in the underlying rural economy accompanied by a relocation of settlement onto the rock-and-peat blacklands to the east of the sandy machair.⁵² In those contexts, machair destabilisation and resulting large-scale erosion, coupled with the impact on the fishing activities of the local population of the rising levels of storminess which drove the terrestrial erosion, rendered the old coastal settlements and the socio-economic activities practiced there unsustainable and unattractive.

How did these shocks to the metabolism of lordship in the Hebrides make themselves manifest in the socio-political behaviour of the regional elite? Despite what may have been as great as a fifty per cent drop in population in Scotland generally across the 1349–59 period, chronicle accounts suggest that

49 Cited in O. Benedictow, *The Black Death 1346–1353: A Complete History* (Woodbridge, 2004), 154.

50 Crawford, 'Structural discontinuity', 24–25.

51 See, for example, Gilbertson and others, 'Sand-drift and soil formation'.

52 Sharples (ed), *Bornais*, 195–197.

the MacDonalds and their subordinate kindreds were still capable of fielding large war-bands.⁵³ This apparent paradox might illustrate a possible class differential in mortality rates, with the better-nourished – and, importantly, mobile – lay elites faring better than commoners.⁵⁴ It is possible that John of Fordun was unconsciously noting such a differential in the demographic breakdown of mortalities when he stated that the plague ‘everywhere attacked especially the meaner sort and common people; – seldom the magnates’.⁵⁵ The better diet and living conditions that might have contributed to that position, however, would have been threatened by the falls in general population and productivity which the combined impacts of climate change and pathogens was bringing about. A once-stable position on an environmental frontier, precarious but sustainable during the MCA, collapsed in the face of this twin assault and pushed Hebridean society off its ‘knife-edge of sustainability’ into marginality. Both the kindreds who supplied chiefly retainers and the lords who used such men to project their power faced growing difficulties in sustaining them. For both, increasing tribute from dependents within their traditional territorial heartlands at a time of continuing environmental stress in the islands was not a viable long-term solution: the only alternative was to find external sources from which to address the short-fall.

In conclusion, the material discussed in this essay suggests that the territorial expansion of the MacDonald lordship and the projection of their power out of the islands into the western mainland of Scotland should not be seen solely through the lenses of dynastic strategy and political opportunity. Buoyed on the back of the more benign weather conditions of the Medieval Climate Anomaly, the society and economy of the Isles had developed to maximise the resource exploitation opportunities of a series of niche activities – marine and terrestrial – with an expanding population supporting the regional elite through a complex system of tribute and exchange. The inexorable slide into a cycle of deteriorating weather, resource depletion and crop failures, accompanied by physical loss of areas of traditional exploitation through coastal erosion, undermined the basis for that regime. Pathogens, affecting both humans and livestock, may have been but a final blow to an already fragile structure. Together, this catalogue of disasters stimulated the push factors in the need at all levels of Isles society to find alternative sources of supply; when the opportunity for external predation and the acquisition of new territory came, the Islesmen were already poised to respond.

53 See, for example, Bower, *Scotichronicon*, vol 8, 7, 9, 75.

54 P. Ziegler, *The Black Death*, revised edition (Stroud, 2003), 170–171.

55 *Chron Fordun*, s.a. 1350.

The MacDonald Lordship and the Bruce Dynasty, c.1306–c.1371

Michael A. Penman

Introduction

Historians cannot help but detect the eddy of irony flowing through the history of relations between the MacDonald Lordship and the Bruce dynasty. The two families were thrown together by their shared opposition to the Comyns and their MacDougall allies, but in an alliance which seems to have at first transcended tensions of Irish Sea and west-coast lordship bubbling in the late thirteenth century. The Bruce lineage – and with it the Scottish kingdom – would of course quite literally be saved by the succour and military support provided by the MacDonalds and other Gaels from c.1306 to c.1314. Yet Bruce's engagement with the MacDonalds as 'Robert I' may have involved him, in part, in forceful intervention in that kindred's own internal power struggles just as it helped them to settle their local feud scores. In turn this may have further obligated Robert's commitment to a campaign which nearly destroyed the Bruce dynasty, the invasion of Ireland of 1315–18.

Thereafter MacDonald-Bruce co-operation, or more tellingly their uneasy subject-lord relationship, foundered on issues of patronage, ambition, obligation and trust. Despite a record of joint endeavour which lent itself readily to chivalric aggrandisement and poetic celebration, after 1332 the MacDonalds felt concord with England during renewed war against the Bruce Scots had more to offer. The title of *Rí Innse Gall*, 'dominus Insularum', was indeed adopted (1336-) in the early stages of this conflict and John, 1st Lord of the Isles, sought to enhance his autonomy from the jurisdictions of the Scottish Parliament and Crown officers by means of alliance with Edward III (and, until 1356, Edward Balliol). The second and last Bruce king, David II, would spend decades struggling to assert his authority over much of his territorial nobility: this would include the MacDonald Lordship which would be forced to accommodate a partial MacDougall restoration in the west and make a first, formal submission to royal power at Inverness in 1369. However, in truth, David was far more concerned and constrained in his final years of rule by attempts to wrangle the mainland families which had first been favoured by his father as, really, a regional check upon the MacDonalds, namely the Stewarts, Campbells and the Earls of Ross.

In hindsight, these events foreshadow the patterns of succeeding centuries of Crown-MacDonald interaction, not least in the Lordship's westward orientation, oft-disputed succession and willingness to seek out English support, set against the Crown's ongoing search for a trustworthy policeman or gatekeeper for the Western Isles lords. It might be suggested that in this context, any ruler and dynasty that emerged from the Wars of Scottish succession to hold the throne would have inevitably stumbled in dealings with the MacDonalds and the wider Gael. And yet, might it be speculated that this history still represents something of a record of failure or a missed opportunity for the Bruce kings, especially Robert I?

The First Wars of Independence, c.1286–c.1330¹

The famous and curious 'Turnberry Band' of September 1286 may at once reflect this intermittent clash of Bruce-MacDonald adherence and ambition. Sealed at the sea-castle caput of their recently acquired ancient earldom, the Bruces had gathered a substantial aristocratic following to pledge support 'in all their affairs' to Richard, the 'Red' second de Burgh Earl of Ulster, and his neighbour, Thomas de Clare of Thomond (into whose kin Robert Bruce of Annandale, the Competitor, had wed).² Yet in doing so, the Bruces may have acted to compel two of those present, Angus Mòr of Islay and his eldest(?) son, Alexander, to cease their kindred's recurrent armed interference with *gallo-glass* in Ulster and Connacht in support of (and sometimes against) such Irish Gaels as the O'Neills, O'Conors and O'Donells (since the 1250s, and as recently as in fighting in 1285–6).³ In return the Bruces surely secured wide promises of

- 1 For the broad background of events in this period not otherwise separately referenced below see: G.W.S. Barrow, *Robert the Bruce and the Community of the Realm of Scotland*, 4th edition (Edinburgh, 2005); R.A. MacDonald, *The Kingdom of the Isles: Scotland's Western Seaboard, c.1100–c.1336* (East Linton, 1997), chapter 6; M. Brown, *The Wars of Scotland, 1214–1371* (Edinburgh, 2004), ch. 12; S. Boardman, *The Campbells, 1250–1513* (Edinburgh, 2006), chapter 2.
- 2 *Documents Illustrative of the History of Scotland*, ed. J. Stevenson (2 vols, Edinburgh, 1870), i, no 12. The other sealers were Patrick, earl of March, and his three sons; Walter Stewart, earl of Menteith, and his two sons; Bruce of Annandale and his sons Bruce earl of Carrick and Richard; James the Steward and his brother, John. Robert Bruce (VII), future king, first appears in the historical record as a witness to an undated gift by Alexander of Islay to Paisley Abbey, alongside his father, the bishop of Argyll and minor figures of Carrick, Kintyre and Arran [*Registrum Monasterii de Passelet* (Maitland Club, Glasgow, 1832), 128–129].
- 3 J.A. Claffey, 'Richard de Burgh, Earl of Ulster (c.1260–1326)'; unpublished PhD, University College of Galway, 1970, 42–72, 103–113; S. Duffy, 'The Bruce Brothers and the Irish Sea

support in their future endeavours relating to the Scottish kingship (a controversy in which Edward I was not yet involved) to be repaid, presumably, by their future and, with any luck, royal generosity.

As earls of Carrick and rightful lords of Upper Glenarm (Larne) the Bruces had married directly into this complicated Irish Sea world, an inheritance rendered all the more personal for the future Robert I by being fostered in childhood to Gaelic kin – probably along with his four brothers to the Carrick relatives, the O’Neills of Tyrone – and both of his marriages: first (c.1293?) to a daughter of Duncan, earl of Mar, who had himself taken a MacRuairi of Garmoran as his second spouse; and second (1302) to Elizabeth de Burgh, daughter of the Red Earl.⁴ But if this gave Robert Bruce and the sons of Angus Mòr substantial common grounds of experience and outlook, the political realities of the next two decades proved to be far more difficult for the younger Robert Bruce to navigate, underscoring the essential difference between regional and regnal ambitions.

The MacDonalds and the Bruces alike found that English overlordship brought its short-term opportunities and compromises. Between 1293 and 1295 both families appealed to Edward I against legal decisions by the regime of John I (Balliol). For Alexander of Islay this furthered local territorial concerns, enabling him to make headway against Alexander MacDougall of Lorn, his father-in-law and the new sheriff of Lorn; Islay’s father, Angus Mòr (d. c.1293–4), had simply exploited the remoteness of his lands and stayed away from court when official interference loomed.⁵ Conversely, Robert Bruce as the new earl of Carrick (from 1293) with estates to inherit in England, too, could not avoid a formal submission to the new vassal King John. Predictably, this drew both MacDonalds and Bruces (and most of the other Scottish sealers of the Turnberry Band) to pledge their loyalty to Edward I when war broke out in 1296. Alexander of Islay and his younger brother, Angus Óg, emerged as the English occupation’s chief sea-borne adherents in the west, supported by Sir John Menteith at Dumbarton. Ordered by Edward I to seize Kintyre for Malcolm Macquillan [le fitz Engleys], the MacDonalds also surely found themselves

World, 1306–29; in S. Duffy (ed.), *Robert the Bruce’s Irish Wars: Invasions of Ireland 1306–1329* (Stroud, 2002), 45–71, at 54–63; idem, ‘The Turnberry Band’, in S. Duffy (ed.), *Princes, Prelates and Poets in Medieval Ireland: Essays in Honour of Katherine Simms* (Dublin, 2013), 124–38. The Band coincided with a ‘great hosting’ in 1286 by Earl Richard against his enemies in Ulster/Connacht. In 1256 and 1260 Henry III of England had blockaded Angus Mòr and other Isles kindreds; in 1263, Mòr and the Irish had invited Haakon IV’s invasion of Scotland to divert to Ireland; in 1264, Alexander III of Scotland had taken Alexander of Islay as a hostage.

4 Barrow, *Robert the Bruce*, 183–184, 430–431 notes 26–32. Duncan of Mar wed Christina [MacRuairi] of the Isles.

5 *Rotuli Scotiae*, i, p. 21; *CDS*, ii, no 236; MacDonald, *Kingdom of the Isles*, 163–164.

able to begin occupying MacDougall and MacRuairi lands and castles even without any formal forfeiture and re-grant by the English king.⁶

By contrast, the younger Bruce (in)famously vacillated. Summer 1297 found the MacDonalds under attack by MacDougall and MacRuairi naval forces with Alexander himself (or a cadet kinsman of the same name) perishing in one such assault in 1299 while his kindred were obliged by Edward I to co-operate at sea with their former feud enemies from Ireland, the Bissets and MacSweens.⁷ But Bruce's credibility would be seriously undermined by one false start rebellion (1297), followed by a period of open resistance (1298–1300) as Guardian alongside the Comyns and their adherents (including the MacDougalls), and then a final desperate submission to Edward I in return for vague acknowledgement of his right to pursue the Scottish kingship (1302).

During all of this, Irish military support for Edward I threatened to cut a swathe across both MacDonald and Bruce lordship concerns. MacDougall naval activity and, from 1296, the Earl of Ulster's provision of men, horses, arms and victuals to English forces in Scotland (though often begrudging and well short of initial levies), conspired to curtail MacDonald galloglass activity in Ireland, if not to cut it off completely.⁸ Indeed, Earl Richard's possible role in soliciting marriages for his sister to Sir James Steward (1296) and then his eldest daughter to Robert Bruce (1302), surely with the blessing or initiative of Edward I, seems designed to revive some of the protection against mercenaries first subscribed to by these lords at Turnberry in 1286.⁹ With Bruce now restored to King Edward's

6 *Rotuli Scotiae*, i, p. 216; *CDS*, ii, nos 235–236; *CPR Edward I*, iii, pp. 52, 200; Stevenson, *Documents*, i, no 390 (a grant of £100 of lands by Edward I) and ii, 189–191, 436.

7 'Alexander MacDonald, that person who was the best for hospitality and excellence that was in Ireland and in Scotland, was killed, together with a countless number of his own people who were slaughtered around him, by Alexander MacDougall' [*Annals of Loch Cé (1014–1590)*, ed. W.M. Hennessy, 2 vols (London, 1871), i, 521; *The Annals of Ulster*, eds W.M. Hennessy and B. MacCarthy, 3 vols (Dublin, 1887–1901), ii, 393]. That this was Alexander of Islay is accepted by: W.D.H. Sellar, 'MacDonald and MacRuairi pedigrees in MS 1467', *West Highland Notes and Queries*, xxviii (1986), 3–15; MacDonald, *Kingdom of the Isles*, 168; C. McNamee, *Robert Bruce: our most valiant Prince, King and Lord* (Edinburgh, 2006), 80; and Brown, *Wars of Scotland*, 259. However, S. Duffy, 'The 'Continuation' of Nicholas Trevet: a new source for the Bruce invasion', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, xci (1991), 303–315, at 311–312, prefers the Alexander killed in 1299 to be a brother of Angus Mòr (with Alexander [Og] of Islay dying later, perhaps at Faughart in 1318). W.D. Lamont, 'Alexander of Islay, son of Angus Mòr', *SHR* lx (1981), 160–169 at 167–169, similarly argues against Alexander's death in 1299. *ALI*, 281, explores all possible options.

8 Claffey, 'Richard de Burgh, Earl of Ulster', 123–128, 138–161, 166–253.

9 C. McNamee, *The Wars of the Bruces: Scotland, England and Ireland, 1306–1328* (East Linton, 1997), 5–6. Earl Richard's second daughter would be married to the Earl of Gloucester/Lord of Kilkenny.

peace (serving in Parliament and as sheriff of Ayr) such pressure could be brought to bear within a circle of alliance and lordship.

At this juncture, c.1302, Bruce's match might easily have been strengthened in this direction by further offers of marriage between the houses of Bruce or Stewart (or Campbell) and the sons/daughters of Alexander of Islay or their uncle, Angus Óg (whose mother was a Campbell of Lochawe). However, it must be acknowledged that even without Edward I's military success and the collapse of the Balliol-Coyrn Guardianship of patriots in 1303–4, the resulting MacDougall and MacRuairi exile, and then a fresh eruption of Bruce ambition in 1306, the MacDonalds may still have preferred to pursue their immediate territorial aims. Angus and his nephews all seem to have made valuable marriage alliances with Irish native kindreds and galloglass by c.1308–9, the year to which secondary authorities often alternatively date Alexander of Islay's death: Alexander's children would give rise to the Mac Domhnaill galloglass rivals to the O'Neills and their MacDonald allies.¹⁰

Nevertheless, there is no doubt about the extent to which the loyalties and fortunes of the MacDonalds were revolutionised by the actions of Bruce in 1306. If Edward I's clear preference by 1305 for the Comyn affinity as his officers in his occupied Scottish land – including the rehabilitated MacDougalls – was not enough to alienate the MacDonalds, then Bruce's slaughter of Comyn of Badenoch, his seizure of the throne and flight west in the face of both English and vengeful Scottish forces, threw his fledgling dynasty into the arms of western lords and their mercenary forces. It should never simply be assumed, though, that the support of the MacDonalds and other Gaelic lords was given naturally or even in friendship. 'Robert I' undoubtedly had to pay a price.

No charters from King Robert to any MacDonald lord are extant in full from this period. But seventeenth-century summary indices do survive of [undated] grants to lords of that kin by the Bruce king of the MacDougall's forfeited lordship of Ardnamurchan, along with lands on Mull and Tiree, plus the former Comyn mainland lordships of Morvern, Duror, Glencoe and, crucially, Lochaber.¹¹ In addition, Archdeacon Barbour, in *The Bruce*, asserts that Angus Óg was 'lord of Kintyre' in 1306.¹² Moreover, during the second phase of the

10 *ALI*, 281–282 [Appendix D – genealogies]; A. McKerral, 'West Highland Mercenaries in Ireland', *SHR*, xxx (1951), 1–29; Duffy, 'The Bruce Brothers and the Irish Sea World', 57–63; K. Nicholls, 'Scottish Mercenary Kindreds in Ireland, 1250–1600', in S. Duffy (ed), *The World of the Galloglass: Kings, Warlords and Warriors in Ireland and Scotland, 1200–1600* (Dublin, 2007), 86–105, at 95–98.

11 *RMS*, i, Appendix ii nos 56–58, 653.

12 John Barbour, *The Bruce*, ed. A.A.M. Duncan (Edinburgh, 1997), 143–147. That the MacDonalds had intruded on Kintyre before c.1306 is suggested by the grant issued by Alexander of Islay of Kintyre lands [*Paisley Registrum*, 128–129; above note 2].

Wars, John MacDonald, 1st 'Lord of the Isles' (son of Angus Óg), would receive charters from both Edward Balliol (1336) and David II (1341/3) covering the lands of Kintyre, Knapdale, Gigha, half of Jura, Colonsay, Mull, Skye, Lewis, Morvern, Ardnamurchan, Glencoe and, again, Lochaber (with further specified castles, small islands, feudal casualties and resources, discussed below).¹³ It is surely the case that these later confirmations are closer to the full scale of MacDonald ambition and speak to territory much of which they had occupied by force since 1296 and thus lordship which Robert I may have had to concede in return for immediate shelter in 1306–7, followed by military support to aid his recovery c.1308–9. Therefore, some or all of these grants surely date to the early years of Robert's reign, say after the fall of Dunstaffnage castle in autumn 1309 (with custody given over to the Campbells), rather than to the king's wider redistribution of forfeited lands begun at the Cambuskenneth Parliament of November 1314 (from which a number of charters are extant).¹⁴ In c.1306–8, promises of Bruce support for a future galloglass campaign to Ireland may also have been secured by the MacDonalds (and an O'Connor rising would erupt in Connacht at this time).¹⁵

In return for these grants, Robert I presumably secured significant military services, including vital galley power. However, that he had issued this patronage with a mixture of reluctance and short-term calculation, perhaps with an eye to revisiting any agreement at a later more stable date for his kingship, is at least suggested by his subsequent grants of key parts of this patrimony to his closest supporters. This certainly included the vast estates of Lochaber to Thomas Randolph as earl of Moray as early as 1312 (as a lord better equipped to provide mainland military power?) and may also have applied to the Stewarts (the lordship of Kintyre), the Campbells (baronies in Argyll) and the Earl of Ross (the lordship of the Isle of Skye).¹⁶

What might easily have complicated matters c.1306 was that the MacDonald Lordship may have been contested and fragmented internally, a possibility not easily isolated from the family's messy genealogical debates which have evolved over time. Bruce's main grant of former Comyn and MacDougall lands was noted as being given in favour of Angus Óg but the Mull and Tiree lands had been received by an 'Alexander de Insula' or

13 *CDS*, iii, no. 1182; *RRS*, vi, 505; *RMS*, i, Appendix i, no. 114 and App. ii, no. 752; *ALI*, 1–4 [nos 1–3], 208–209 [A5].

14 Barbour, *The Bruce*, 366; *RRS*, v, nos 10 [charter issued by the king at Dunstaffnage, 20 Oct 1309], 41–43.

15 Claffey, 'Richard de Burgh, Earl of Ulster', 294.

16 *RRS*, v, no. 389; *RMS*, i, Appendix ii, nos 61 [Skye to Hugh Earl of Ross], 661 [Kintyre to Robert Stewart].

'Alexander the younger', possibly the still living elder brother, then, or his or Angus's eldest son in turn. Furthermore, Robert I's first Parliament at St Andrews in March 1309 would be attended by a 'Donald of Islay', whom Professor Barrow suggests (without any conclusive proof) may have been another elder brother (or, it might be thought, an uncle or cousin?) of both Alexander and Angus.¹⁷ Donald it was who witnessed that Parliament's famous nobles' letter to the King of France, his name recorded immediately after 'John [MacDougall] of Argyll' (who would soon defect) and in anticipation of the 'barons also of the whole of Argyll and the Isles'.¹⁸ Rival claims of seniority and degree, primogeniture and tanistry, might thus easily have afflicted the Isles Lordship then as they would later, forcing Bruce to deal with one or more MacDonald lord or their allies.

This may explain why, although in fact it was galloglass lord Malcolm Macquillan who had prepared shelter at Dunaverty Castle in Kintyre for Bruce and his dwindling party, until their flight by boat to the Irish mainland or one of the Western Isles in August-September 1306, Archdeacon Barbour attributed Bruce's rescue (and a flight to Rathlin) to Angus Óg, perhaps as Angus did eventually assert himself as 'lord of Islay'.¹⁹ Moreover, Barbour – although influenced by Crown-MacDonald relations c.1329–75 – also hints that even once received at Dunaverty, King Robert 'was dredand for tresoun ay', perhaps a reflection of his vulnerability to the rivalries of competing local lords.²⁰

17 Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, pp. 231, 408; *CDS*, iv, no. 1822; *Liber Sancte Marie de Melros*, 2 vols (Bannatyne Club, 1837), ii, no 376; *ALI*, 282. Duncan accepts Barrow's argument and Donald as the elder brother and 'Lord' [Barbour, *The Bruce*, 148]. McNamee's suggestion that this was a scribal error for '[Angus Óg Mac]Donald, Lord of Islay' cannot account for all the other record evidence for a Donald [McNamee, *Robert Bruce*, 323 note 31], nor the use of this christian name in Parliament in 1309 in the same way as 'John' of Argyll. Lamont, 'Alexander of Islay', 168–169, dismisses the likely existence of 'Donald'. In contrast, Duffy, 'The 'Continuation' of Nicholas Trevet', 311–312, followed by D.H. Caldwell, *Islay: the Land of the Lordship* (Edinburgh, 2008), 45, argues that 'Donald' was a cousin of brothers Alexander and Angus.

18 *RPS*, 1309/1. MacDonald, *Kingdom of the Isles*, 187–188, argues that the complex MacDonald genealogy suggests that 'Donald' was perhaps a son of Alexander or Angus, who contested the family succession 1318x1325.

19 Barbour, *The Bruce*, 144–146.

20 The sixteenth-century history of the MacDonalds perhaps protested too much: 'He [Angus Óg] was always a follower of King Robert Bruce in all his wars'. [*Highland Papers*, ed. J.R.N. MacPhail, 4 vols (Scottish History Society, 1914), i, 1–103, at 17]. For further discussion of the MacDonald genealogy see Caldwell, *Islay*, 43–45, which suggests Alexander of Islay died not in 1299, but c.1309, drawing on the aforementioned MacDonald family history to relate a tale that Alexander had died after Robert I had

Bruce's actual flight from Kintyre to the Isles in 1306 may besides have seen him pitch up, as Archibald Duncan suggests, at Dunyvaig castle on Islay itself to force a(nother) leading MacDonald to open negotiations about service.²¹

Their ambitions apparently satisfied, the MacDonalds and their galloglass nonetheless proved highly motivated and effective military allies. Both Irish and Scottish sources attest to their intimidating presence in Bruce's forces after his landing in Carrick in 1307, aiding both the King's northern campaign in 1308 against Ross, the Comyns and, of course, the MacDougalls, as well as Edward Bruce's parallel surge in Galloway;²² and on to Bannockburn where Barbour asserts a large body of men of the Isles, Kintyre and Argyll turned out in the vanguard of Robert I's own division.²³ It seems clear that the Isles and galloglass military traditions of galley power and lightly-armoured, mounted hobelar raiding parties, familiar to the Bruces from their Carrick youth, were positively embraced and thus had profound impact upon both Bruce military tactics and, surely, some personal relations within the regime and its forces.²⁴

Indeed, regardless of whether or not this relationship of service began in an atmosphere of dictated lordship or opportunism, it must be acknowledged that the Bruce Scots' momentum of success may have benefited from and further developed a genuine shared ethos of identity within their armed cause for the royal family and some of its key mainland supporters, as well as the MacDonalds, MacRuairis and other Gaels. What can be construed as mere propaganda to eastern Lowland lords and clergy (and as 'fishing' to one modern historian) may have had a real resonance within the context of a 'national ancestry...common language...common custom' (and common spiritual lights) shared by those whose lands marched on the Irish Sea, interconnected by marriage, tenure, lordship and saints' cult *familia*. The Gaelic-speaking Bruce may

besieged him in Castle Sween in Argyll then gaoled him in Dundonald castle: this might mean that, as per Barbour's tradition, it was Alexander of Islay, not his brother Angus Óg, who had handed over Dunaverty to Robert I in 1306, and thus that lord (who had a MacDougall wife) from whom Bruce feared treason. Lamont, 'Alexander of Islay', 161–162, seeks to debunk this tale.

- 21 Barbour, writing in the early reign of Robert II (1371–90), the former Robert Steward, may have been seeking to rehabilitate Angus, the father of John MacDonald, first Lord of the Isles, son-in-law of Steward, the new king (much as he played up Walter Steward and James Douglas for their successors)?
- 22 *Chron Bower*, vi, 66, states that a 'Donald of Islay' led galloglass alongside Edward Bruce in the south-west in 1308.
- 23 Barbour, *The Bruce*, 420–421.
- 24 McNamee, *Wars of the Bruces*, chapters 3–6; N.A.M. Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea: A Naval History of Britain, 660–1649* (London, 1997), 86–89.

have been quite at home in his exile, renewing former acquaintances as well as begging further help. Historians have now firmly established these motivations as tangible long before Bannockburn, attested to by the Bruce letter to the Gaelic Irish of 1307, rumours of a liaison between the king and Christina of the Isles, and decisive Bruce and galloglass intervention in May 1313 both to take the Isle of Man (seized by the Earl of Ulster for Edward I in 1290) and attempt a galley raid into Ulster.²⁵

In sum, just as modern historians have recently investigated in depth the Bruces' motives for the invasion of Ireland of 1315–18, so a further reassessment of these motives and the allied influence over Scottish policy of kindreds like the MacDonalds and other Gaels may be long overdue. Bruce's debt to the MacDonalds and MacRuairis for their support c.1306–14, the unfulfilled aims of inheritance, territory and plunder in Ireland of these families' galloglass allies and followings, a thirst for further revenge against internecine rivals as well as exiled opponents like the MacDougalls, MacDowalls and the de Burgh Earl of Ulster, all bound within a sense of mission to throw off English overlordship, may have been equally, if not more, important than considerations of diplomatic force, supplies and strategy vis à vis Carlisle and Westminster, to those lords who committed themselves to the Irish enterprise.

It is interesting to speculate that the MacDonalds were not completely united in their support of the Irish campaign under Edward Bruce's banner. March 1315 had seen Edward II order John MacDougall of Argyll, captain of naval forces in the Irish Sea and responsible for the retaking of the Isle of Man earlier that year, to take into his peace a number of Islesmen, including a 'Donald of Islay'. Thus when Robert I launched his famous assault across the Tarbert isthmus between northern Kintyre and Knapdale in May-June 1315, timed to coincide with his brother's descent on Ulster and with the support of his returning fleet of transport galleys, the King may have sought to publically fulfil an ancient Norse prophecy: that whosoever could cross this isthmus in ships with sails unfurled would be master of the Western Isles.²⁶ Yet in reality Robert may have done so by way of overawing enemies like the MacDougalls but also in support of the dominance of one of several rival MacDonald lords.

Frustratingly, the Irish annals do not firmly identify the MacDonald leader who would be slain at Faughart on 14 October 1318 (destroyed by an enemy which included his galloglass kinsman and now rival, Aed O'Domhnaill): he

25 Duffy, 'The Bruce Brothers and the Irish Sea World', 50–52, 62–63, 68–70; A.A.M. Duncan, 'The Scots' Invasion of Ireland, 1315', in R.R. Davies (ed), *The British Isles, 1100–1500: Comparison, Contrasts and Connections* (Edinburgh, 1988), 100–117.

26 *Rotuli Scotiae*, i, 122, 132; Barbour, *The Bruce*, 560, 564–565.

fell alongside Edward Bruce, a MacRuairi chieftain and scions of the houses of Stewart, Soules, Mowbray and Menteith. Only one annalist, that of Inisfallen, provides a christian name for this lord as 'Alexander M[...]' whilst those of Ulster and Connacht record the fallen as 'Mac Ruaidrí rí Innse Gall [and] MacDomnaill rí Oirir Gaedéal [Argyll]'. As a result of this uncertainty Alexander of Islay or a namesake son, and even Angus Óg himself or, if the latter had died c.1315x1318, his heir in turn (Alexander?), have all been suggested as possible candidates.²⁷ A separate 'Donald' of Islay is also stated to have been killed in the battle by another Irish source.²⁸ It seems likely, however, that Angus or his son in fact ruled as lord of Islay until c.1330 as the father or elder brother of the John, 1st *Rí Innse Gall*, who would be so at odds with David II and live on until 1387. Whoever had acted as chief since c.1306 seems to have combined participation in Edward Bruce's campaigns with the assertion of their lordship over the conquered MacDougall territories as well as, perhaps, over their own family cadets and patrimony. Thus it is also possible that the chief's death at Faughart heralded a minority and sparked a further internal MacDonald power struggle.

If it was in truth only after this defeat or later in the 1320s that Angus Óg, or one of his sons, emerged as unchallenged lord of Islay, this lord's potentially more troubled relations with Robert I (who may thus have favoured Alexander or Donald) may explain much of the apparent unravelling of the Crown-MacDonald alliance in the second half of Bruce's reign. Yet the marked shift in Crown policy towards the Western Isles and the MacDonalds after 1318 must explain this in greater measure. Even before the disaster at Faughart, the Isles kindreds may have become dissatisfied with the Irish campaign. There is no extant charter evidence to suggest that Edward Bruce rewarded his galloglass supporters with seized Anglo-Norman lands in Ireland (although this was surely something he planned to do once established and which might have enabled Robert I to compensate kin like the MacDonalds as he looked to rearrange his early west-coast and allied Highland land grants).²⁹ Mid-1316 had seen Edward Bruce's forces capture Northburgh castle on the north coast of Donegal, a stronghold erected by the Earl of Ulster to discourage galloglass

27 *Annals of Inisfallen*, ed. S. Mac Airt (Dublin, 1951), 428–429; *Annals of Connacht* (AD 1224–1554), ed. A.M. Freeman (Dublin, 1944), 252–253; *ALI*, 281; Duffy, 'The Bruce Brothers and the Irish Sea World', 61; McNamee, *Wars of the Bruces*, 185–186; MacDonald, *Kingdom of the Isles*, 186–187. Barbour, *The Bruce*, 667–677, mentions a Mowbray, a Soules, a Stewart and Carrick men killed at Faughart but no MacDonald or MacRuairi chiefs.

28 Duffy, 'Continuation' of Nicholas Trevet, 311–312, 314 [Donald].

29 Duffy, 'The Bruce Brothers and the Irish Sea World', 62.

incursion from the Western Isles (and a harbour used by MacDougall's ships).³⁰ However, the main thrust of the 1316 and 1317 seasons saw the invaders and their erratic native vassals (including the MacDonalds' allies, the O'Conors) push further into central and southern Ireland on increasingly risky, ill-supplied chevauchées, away from the familiar pickings of Ulster and Connacht. Then there were delays in the dispatch of Scottish mainland reinforcements to Edward Bruce in 1318 as the focus of Robert I and his government turned east to fending off English attempts to recover Berwick-upon-Tweed, taken by the Scots in April that year, and to stabilising the Bruce settlement and succession. The feud nature of the Irish wars may also have been considerably lessened for many parties after autumn 1317 by the natural death of John MacDougall of Argyll.³¹

More generally in the wake of Faughart, after decades of war there may have been a natural recoiling by the King and his Lowland subjects away from the violence, frequent treachery and terrible cost of such galloglass assaults. Following the Anglo-Scottish truces which punctuated the period 1319–27 any strategic re-intervention by Robert I in Ireland would see him revert, in the spirit of the Turnberry Band of 1286, to engage not with the native Irish and galloglass but with the de Burgh earldom of Ulster: here in 1327–8 he used intimidation to extract victuals and to install his underage nephew, William de Burgh (hinting at a lingering, influential inheritance role for Queen Elizabeth (d. 1327) after the death of her father, Earl Richard, in 1326).³² This approach underscored the Crown's shift to what might best be described as a western-approaches policy intended to at once contain and keep at arm's length Isles kindreds headed by the MacDonalds and MacRuairis.

This new tack was characterised by royal marriages for western and northern mainland families whose holdings and influence either marched upon or were now increased by royal grant around Argyll and the Isles lordships. This was a group headed by Walter Steward (married to Robert I's daughter in 1315 but who became lord of Kintyre in the 1320s), Hugh, earl of Ross (married to Robert's sister by c.1315, who became lord of Skye, and whose daughter wed

30 Claffey, 'Richard de Burgh, Earl of Ulster', 259–260; S. Duffy, 'The Bruce Invasion of Ireland: a Revised Itinerary and Chronology', in S. Duffy (ed), *Robert the Bruce's Irish Wars*, 9–44 for what follows and 29 for Northburgh.

31 *CDS*, iii, nos 490, 912. MacDonald commitment to the galloglass cause is underlined by the reported death in battle in Derry in 1318, of another unnamed MacDonald lord alongside Seoan, son and heir of Domnaill Ó Néill [*Annals of Loch Cé*, i, 594–595; Duffy, 'The Bruce Brothers and the Irish Sea World', 61].

32 Nicolson, 'A Sequel to Edward Bruce's Invasion of Ireland', in S. Duffy (ed), *Robert Bruce's Irish Wars*, 153–161; McNamee, *Wars of the Bruces*, 242–246.

Thomas Randolph, 3rd Earl of Moray and lord of Lochaber), Neil Campbell of Lochawe (wed to another sister of the king and raised to be earl of Atholl) and the Crown ward, William, earl of Sutherland.³³ These men and their close adherents also received key regional offices and strongholds alongside other western Crown allies such as the Menteiths, the Earl of Lennox and Malcolm Fleming of Biggar.³⁴ The Crown presence in the region was also intensified, with retiring Chancellor, Bernard of Arbroath, transferring to be Bishop of the Isles in 1328, housed in a new diocesan church planned for the Isle of Man.³⁵ A sheriffship of Argyll was established sometime c.1315–25 and Robert I consolidated considerable investment in castles with administrative and trading roles at Dunstaffnage, Dunaverty, Tarbert and, to a lesser extent, the Carrick caput of Turnberry, as well as at his own personal manor house at Cardross, near Dumbarton, where he and Randolph also retained galleys (enhancing access to Ulster).³⁶

Indeed, what turned out to be the last few months of his reign also saw Robert I apparently extract by personal itinerary and patronage further naval and military services from west coast and south-west mainland kindreds.³⁷ To date there has been a general historical consensus that this was a wise and quite impressive fortification of westward defences in anticipation of renewed war against England, under Edward III, and the Disinherited, a move sensitive

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- 33 *RRS*, v, nos 391 [Steward]; 246 [Ross]; 27, 46, 128, 366, 374, 393 [Campbell]. *RMS* i, Appendix ii, nos 168, 218–222, 363, 661, 692 (an appoyntment with the barons of Argyll) [Steward]; 11, 45, 49, 50, 58–61, 370, 380–381, 383 [Ross]; 152, 351–353 362, 368, 642 [Campbell]. *ER*, i, pp. 24, 57 [Campbell ship to Tarbert], 74 [Dugal Campbell, sheriff of Argyll]. *The Scots Peerage*, ed. J.B. Paul, 9 vols (Edinburgh, 1904–14), viii, 324 for Sutherland.
- 34 *RRS*, v, nos 239, 419, 501–502, 546 [Menteith]; 11, 118, 194, 468 [Lennox]; 553 [Fleming]. *RMS*, i, Appendix ii, nos 350, 514, 585 [Menteith]; 204, 418 [Lennox]; 194–196 [Fleming]. *ER*, i, 178, 180, 257, 258. For discussion of this royal party see Boardman, *The Campbells*, 45.
- 35 *ER*, i, 114; *RRS*, v, no 358. Robert I reserved the patronage of the see to himself on 20 December 1324 [D.E.R. Watt and A.L. Murray (eds), *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticanæ Medii Aevi Ad Annum 1638* (Edinburgh, 2003), 262].
- 36 *ER*, i, 52–57, 127 [Tarbert Castle, also with mooring for the ‘great ship’]; 56, 123, 127, 149, 269 [Cardross]; 52, 196 [sheriff of Argyll, Dugald Campbell]; 38 [Dumbarton Castle, constable William Fleming]; 53 [Tarbet west town and peel]. *RMS*, i, Appendix ii, nos 368, 462 [Dunstaffnage Castle, constable Arthur Campbell]. J.G. Dunbar and A.A.M. Duncan. ‘Tarbert Castle’, *SHR*, I (1971), 1–17.
- 37 *RRS*, v, nos 362 to 374(A); *RMS*, i, Appendix ii, nos 607–610, 612–615, 617, 622–624. A total of two galleys, four armed, four archers and a spearman were secured on Robert’s Whithorn pilgrimage of Feb–Apr 1329.

to questions of loyalty to the Bryce dynasty in the west and south-west. It might also seem to reflect attempts to build a strong network of patronage in the west through which Robert I and, after his death in 1329, the Guardianship of Thomas Randolph (d.1332), could look to police and raise revenues effectively from the west.³⁸ However, in reality it might be prudent to acknowledge the possibility that many of these Bruce grants in return for the services of oared-galleys and spearmen were, at best, nominal.

For as had Richard, earl of Ulster, Bruce may have found it otherwise difficult to extract any rental income or alternative services from what were remote and very often disturbed, relatively impoverished and highly militarised regions.³⁹ Decades of conflict and plunder, harsh winters and wet summers, lingering livestock pandemic and limited production of new Scottish royal specie only after 1318, may have combined to drive lords and men in Scotland generally to the point where tenure confirmations and fresh grants in return for specified military services may have been the only bearable demands of lordship (as short as 40 days a year, infrequent, deliverable by proxy or avoidable).⁴⁰ Robert's Parliament of December 1318 had gone to some lengths to legislate for the quality and preparedness of subjects' arms and armour in time of war throughout the realm, details which must in part reflect royal experience of west coast warfare.⁴¹ Yet in reality Robert could perhaps only hope for an uneven return on his patronage with a dwindling military muster response the further north and west his summonses would have to travel out from central Scotland, beyond the established militarised followings of such key councillors and captains as the Campbells and Sir John Menteith.

By the mid-1320s this was undoubtedly the case, too, as regards the remaining lands held of the Bruce monarchy by the MacDonalds and their regional adherents, where cadets and lesser kindreds were militarised for galloglass purposes. This reflected just how limited the royal writ was beyond the Stewartry, Lennox and central Argyll and the immediate vicinity of any more westward Crown castles. In March 1325, relations with the MacRuairis collapsed and Parliament forfeited their lands.⁴² It seems legitimate to ask,

38 *RRS*, v, 48–61 ['Services and Returns'], especially 52–54.

39 Claffey, 'Richard de Burgh, Earl of Ulster', 189, 282.

40 McNamee, *Wars of the Bruces*, 13–14; T. Newfield, 'A cattle panzootic in early fourteenth-century Europe', *Agricultural History Review*, 57 (2009), 155–190.

41 *RPS*, 1318/29.

42 *RPS*, 1325/2; *RMS*, i, Appendix ii, no. 699. This may explain visits to Tarbert in that year by the king, Douglas and the Bishop of St Andrews; 12 May 1325 had found the king at Cardross, perhaps returning from the west [*ER*, i, 56, 58; *RRS*, v, no 274(A)]. Caldwell,

however, if this judgement was ever actually enforced on the ground by royal officers before the MacRuairi 'restoration' in the later 1330s-early 1340s: did this kindred ever really face royal justice and exile? It is difficult to escape the sense, too, that in the last few years of Robert I's life, the MacDonalds, probably under Angus Óg or his son, were headed down a similar road towards confrontation with their former Bruce masters – particularly over royal tax collection between 1326 and 1331 – yet unlikely to face physical displacement: unless at the hands of the unexpected fifth column of the MacDougalls, who might call upon residual local loyalties if restored as part of the 1328 Anglo-Scottish peace process; or with mutual de Burgh aid for the Bruce dynasty in rooting out outlaws active in each other's lands.⁴³ It remains highly debatable that royal favour at this point in the form of a belated marriage, high office or restored mainland holdings would have prevented the alienation of Crown-MacDonald relations.

The Second Phase of the Wars, c.1330–71⁴⁴

In September 1335, the decision of John of Islay to ally with Edward Balliol and Edward III in return for confirmation of the extensive regality of former MacDougall holdings seemed to follow the precedent of MacDonald choices of allegiance in 1296 and 1306: taking advantage of war, the wider political crisis and the power vacuum resultant from the deaths of Robert I, Bishop Bernard and Thomas Randolph, among others, as well as the murder of Earl William of Ulster (1332) and the English capture of the Isle of Man (1333), to forward MacDonald regional lordship priorities.⁴⁵ In truth, the situation may have become more complex with Lord John preferring to remain aloof from the fighting for as long as possible and prepared to consider what both sides had to offer before responding to pressure from various directions.

Islay, 47, is not alone in suggesting that the 'Roderick of Islay' noted (in seventeenth-century transcripts) as forfeited in parliament was in fact a MacDonald, perhaps John's elder brother.

43 S. Cameron and A. Ross, 'The Treaty of Edinburgh and the Disinherited (1328–1332)', *History*, lxxxiv (1999), 237–256.

44 For the broad background of events in this period not otherwise separately referenced below see: Brown, *The Wars of Scotland*, chapter 12; M. Penman, *David II* (East Linton, 2004); 'MacDonald family' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, eds H.C.G. Matthew and B. Harrison, 60 vols (Oxford, 2004), vol 35, 202–204; Boardman, *The Campbells*, chapter 3; A. Beam, *The Balliol Dynasty, 1210–1364* (Edinburgh, 2008).

45 *CDS*, iii, no 1182.

By the end of 1334 the Bruce dynasty might all too easily have appeared doomed. Only a handful of royal castles, including Dumbarton, Dunstaffnage and Tarbert, remained in the control of supporters of David II, with the child king himself exiled to France while his heir presumptive, Robert Steward, struggled to retain a foothold in his Stewartry lands. In late summer 1335 Anglo-Balliol naval forces from Ireland assailed the Steward's Clydeside lands with sufficient menace as to force that lord briefly to submit to Edward III and Balliol.⁴⁶ Crucially, although this may have facilitated (or secured earlier) MacDonald intrusion into Kintyre, these same forces could now threaten both MacDonald galloglass routes to interests across the Irish Sea and their Hebridean lordships. This may explain why John was unconvinced by the reported overtures of Bruce Guardian John Randolph, earl of Moray, at Tarbert in summer 1335. Randolph, after all, may have had a weak hand to play, unable to make concessions over Lochaber and Glencoe (while the Strathbogie earl of Atholl remained on the Bruce Scots' side until late August) or over Kintyre and Skye (for fear then of alienating Robert Steward and the earl of Ross).⁴⁷

Edward Balliol and Edward III had no such qualms about granting away enemy lands to the MacDonalds and by 12 September John had made his treaty with the English King and his vassal. However, he maintained no desire to become embroiled in the mainland conflict and coupled his switch of allegiance to adoption of the title of Lord of the Isles (21 September 1336).⁴⁸ It is surely the case that the Balliol grant of MacDonald titles, in conjunction with the coveted MacDougall baronies, given in a Parliament at Perth on 12 September 1336 attended by Edward III, must also have been accompanied by firm assurances that John of Argyll's namesake grandson and heir, then a youth in exile in England, would not receive Anglo-Balliol backing to recover his estates. John had thus rather smartly neutralised the threat from both Bruce and Balliol directions (or so he may have thought).⁴⁹ Although John did have to surrender hostages – his 'next cousins in minority' until he had a lawful son of his own – Edward Balliol promised to be his heir's godfather (just as Edward

46 *CDS*, iii, no 1174; *Sir Thomas Gray, Scalacronica, 1272–1363*, ed. A. King (Woodbridge, 2005), 99, 100–101; *Adae Murimuth (1275–1347) Continuato Chronicum Robertus de Avesbury de Gestis Mirabilibus Edwardi Tertii*, ed. E.M. Thompson (London, 1889), 299–301.

47 *Chron Bower*, vii, 111–113; *Chron Wyntoun*, vi, 52–53.

48 *ALI*, 1–4 [nos 1–3, especially Sellar's title analysis, note no 3].

49 S. Boardman, 'The Tale of Leper John and the Campbell Acquisition of Lorn', in E.J. Cowan and R.A. MacDonald (eds), *Alba: Celtic Scotland in the Medieval Era* (East Linton, 2000), 219–247, at 232.

I had been his). John's Anglo-Balliol submission also seemed to allow him lee-way in his continued dealings in Ireland: on 24 May 1338, for example, Edward III would accede to John's request that his ally in Ireland, Hugh Bisset, be granted lands in the once Bruce-held barony of Glenarm in Larne.⁵⁰

That Lord John remained largely removed from the military and political machinations of the war and focussed upon Hebridean concerns is reflected in two further occurrences; first, his (perhaps quite late) marriage c.1337 to his cousin, Amy MacRuairi, sister of Ranald of Garmoran, by whom he would sire several sons;⁵¹ and, second, by Lord John's apparently simple return to David II's peace following the 17-year-old king's return from exile in June 1341. Probably at Ayr about 9 November that year, it was surely John who was present to receive David's confirmation of MacDonald possession of Islay, all of Kintyre, Gigha, Jura, Colonsay, Morvern and Morenish in Mull), lands granted to them (early?) in the reign of Robert I and then again by Edward Balliol in 1336. Further, now lost, royal charters might have been issued to John at this time, perhaps including a fresh grant of Lochaber (without Balliol's limitation of only wardship over Lochaber until the Strathbogie heir came of age) while John Randolph, earl of Moray and lord of Lochaber, was still a prisoner of England.⁵² John of the Isles' brother-in-law, MacRuairi, was also 'restored' to royal favour and his lands by David about this time.⁵³ John was so grateful as to send the king a gift of two prize hawks sometime in the year before June 1342.⁵⁴

50 *CDS*, iii, no 1272; *CPR Edward III, 1338–49*, 81–82, 88. As John, 'whose steady loyalty and exposure to peril in defense of his rights [Edward III] well knows'. Edward III also granted John (and up to 100 men and ships) safe-conducts to England [*Rotuli Scotiae*, i, 516, 534, 535].

51 *HP*, i, 74; *ALI*, 242 [B22]. A Papal dispensation was issued for this match on 4 June 1337; so much for the MacRuairis' 1325 forfeiture?

52 *RMS*, i, Appendix i, no 114; *RRS*, vi, p. 505. This favours the view that the transcribed and abridged copy of the grant to MacDonald has mistakenly turned 'John, son of Angus de Insulis' into 'Angus, son of John de Insulis' [noted in *ALI*, 207, A1]. At Ayr on 9 and 11 November 1341 respectively David had granted Sir Malcolm Fleming the earldom of Wigtown and Sir William Ramsay the lands of Carnock [*RRS*, vi, nos 39–40].

53 *RRS*, vi, nos 73, 485.

54 *ER*, i, 511, perhaps intended for the royal falcon house at Cardross [*ER*, i, 127]. The timing of this gift from 'Johannis de Insulis' indicates that c.Nov 1341 David had recognised Lord John's position, not an 'Angus, son of John'. The alternative view is that David II had tried to favour a cousin (and rival?) of John, in 1341, Angus MacIain of Ardnamurchan [Brown, *Wars of Scotland*, 270]. Either way, in 1341 David had tried to give Kintyre to a MacDonald, depriving Steward.

The willingness of David and his close councillors to allow John to continue in possession of all these territories is explained by the king's more pressing need to challenge the accumulated power of key regional mainland families who had also benefitted from the vacuum of war and the royal minority and absence, not least William, earl of Ross, and Robert Steward, the royal heir presumptive. By contrast to these lords David may have reasoned that the MacDonalds had done far less since c.1332 to directly undermine Bruce authority, despite their alliance with England, and Lord John (and Ireland) remained beyond the king's immediate sphere of interest.⁵⁵ Besides, since the mid-1330s or earlier, territorial tensions between the Stewartry and Lordship, particularly around the Clyde and Kintyre, had probably escalated into an open feud which was now of short term value to the Crown. David's grant to John c. November 1341 may, then, as with several other acts of patronage at that time, have been designed to put regional pressure on the Steward.

The Steward and his growing family, however, proved resilient to royal intrusion and throughout 1342–3 David may have been obliged in turn to back down in his efforts to build an affinity and reassert royal authority in several localities. John MacDonald may thus have been a casualty of Stewart resurgence. At a Council in June 1343, again at Ayr, 'after diligent discussion and bearing the peace of our realm in mind', David reissued a revised form of the MacDonald patrimony grant to John 'de Yle [our dear cousin]' (the only occasion on which the Crown accorded John this honour in style) but this time reserving Kintyre and the Isle of Skye which were recovered by the Steward and Ross respectively.⁵⁶ This decision surely hid pressure applied to David and his fledgling support by Steward, Campbell of Lochawe, Ross, John Menteith of Arran and Knapdale and perhaps even Ranald MacRuairi and John Randolph, earl of Moray (released in early 1342 and who may have reclaimed Lochaber).⁵⁷ Since the mid-1330s, the majority of these lords with west coast interests must have found themselves and their tenants

55 David II seemingly ignored an invitation c. April 1344 to join Anglo-Norman rebels against the authorities in Ireland [G.O. Sayles, 'The Rebellious First Earl of Desmond', in J.A. Watt, J.B. Marshall and F.X. Martin (eds), *Medieval Studies presented to Aubrey Gwynn* (Dublin, 1961), 203–230, at 219–222].

56 *RRS*, v, no 72; *ALI*, 207–208 [A2–A4]. The Bishop of the Isles now had his diocesan seat on Skye. On 25 May 1342, William earl of Ross had secured a dispensation to wed Mary, sister of Angus Og [*ALI*, 242 [B23]].

57 *RRS*, v, nos 54, 69, 73; Penman, *David II*, 98–100. David II suffered a similar reverse in 1342 in regard to Douglas and Stewart ambitions in Liddesdale and the earldom of Atholl [Penman, *David II*, 84–93]. In June 1343 the MacDonalds also lost land in Argyll to the MacNaughtons [*RRS*, vi, nos 485, 488].

increasingly ranged against ceteran forces loyal to MacDonald aggressively expanding his lordship, including several MacDonald cadets, the MacLeans on Mull, the MacLeods on Lewis, the Mackintoshes in Lochaber and Mackinnons out of Iona (where they also exercised spiritual lordship under Lord John's control through Iona Abbey).⁵⁸

The late fourteenth-century English chronicler, Henry Knighton – privy to David II's later complex diplomatic talks with Edward III – caught something of the sense of crisis this reverse represented:

[In 1343] a dispute arose in Scotland between King David, who has made himself king, and John of Islay and others there. But King David bowed to their will, for if he had not he would have lost the kingdom...⁵⁹

Again, though, it is relevant to ask to what degree this royal act actually represented a reverse on the ground for MacDonald lordship. John's feud with the Stewarts and others in Kintyre and Skye seems to have continued, probably only drawing to a close when he agreed to marry Robert Stewart's daughter, Margaret, in the late 1340s, possibly displacing his first (MacRuairi) wife in the process.⁶⁰ By then, however, the political framework and regional lordship had again been revolutionised by David II's capture in battle against England at Neville's Cross on 17 October 1346. The latter was a campaign for which John of Islay had refused to respond to the Crown's summons, unlike Ranald MacRuairi who had been murdered at the muster by his rival William, earl of Ross.⁶¹

These dramatic events again benefitted MacDonald lordship and John moved to play the situation for all it was worth. As early as 4 November 1346 he entertained fresh overtures of alliance as *dominus Insularum* with envoys of Edward III.⁶² It was surely also not long after this that marriage talks began with the Steward, now King's Lieutenant, whose energies were drawn east to secure control of the central Scottish earldoms of Menteith, Strathearn and Fife and to stave off David II's attempts to broker his release from England through a treaty which altered the Scottish royal succession. As Richard Oram has emphasised, it was thus Stewart patronage which dictated the terms of

58 R.D. Oram, 'The Lordship of the Isles: 1336–1545', in D. Omand (ed), *The Argyll Book* (Edinburgh, 2004), 123–139, at 127–128; *ALI*, lv–lxi.

59 *Knighton's Chronicle, 1337–96*, ed. G.H. Martin (Oxford, 1995), 41.

60 A marriage dispensation was granted by the Papacy on 18 July 1350 [*Vetera Monumenta Hibernorum et Scotorum Historiam Illustrantia*, ed. A. Theiner, (Rome, 1864), 278; *ALI*, 242 [B25]].

61 *Chron Wyntoun*, vi, 174; *HP*, i, 17.

62 *Rotuli Scotiae*, i, 677.

much of this political marriage of convenience.⁶³ Yet this match did arguably invest MacDonald lordship over most of the Isles and key adjacent coastal holdings with its most substantive legitimacy to date.

Robert Steward was not only prepared to gift Kintyre and Knapdale as his daughter's dowry and to confirm John's inheritance and sub-infeudation of his first wife's Garmoran lands to their sons (hence the Clanranald MacDonalds), but also to concede MacDonald presence perhaps in Skye (so antagonising the Earl of Ross) and certainly in Lochaber and Moray bounding on Badenoch (which last the Steward acquired by taking John Randolph's widow, Euphemia, a sister of the Earl of Ross, as his second wife in 1355).⁶⁴ It was therefore perhaps in this period that John MacDonald's consolidation of a great Council of the Isles, meeting in a purpose-built chamber with chapel at Finlaggan on Islay, really took root.⁶⁵

These developments undoubtedly linked John of Islay in David II's mind with Robert Steward and other political troublemakers. In August 1354 David and his procurators named Lord John along with the Steward, his lieutenant Sir Thomas Murray, William Lord of Douglas and the earls of March and Ross, as potential hostages to be surrendered if the Scots defaulted on the ransom instalments then proposed for the Scottish king's release.⁶⁶ Although these talks were aborted, David was also surely directly involved in the remarkable return to Scotland sometime c.1350–3 of John MacDougall, known as *Gallda* (the 'Foreigner'), claimant to his family's disinherited Argyll lands. From his own exile, the king may have had a hand as early as 1352 in MacDougall's marriage to his niece, Janet (daughter of Thomas Isaac and Matilda Bruce), just as he would intervene in noble marriages in Bothwell, Menteith, Fife, Carrick, Mar and Ross during his 'second reign'.

On 23 January 1358, shortly after his release to Scotland, David would confirm John MacDougall's possession of his family's lands in Lorn.⁶⁷ David also

63 Oram, 'Lordship of the Isles: 1336–1545', 124.

64 A. Grant, 'Scotland's 'Celtic Fringe' in the Late Middle Ages: the MacDonald Lords of the Isles and the Kingdom of Scotland', in Davies ed., *The British Isles, 1100–1500*, 118–141, at 126–128; Boardman, *The Campbells*, 62–64.

65 D.H. Caldwell and G. Ewart, 'Finlaggan and the Lordship of the Isles: An Archaeological Approach', *SHR*, lxxii (1993), 146–166. In 1349, documentation confirming William Russell as bishop of the Isles named William Montagu of Man, Robert Steward 'of Bute' and 'Johanni Moac Dofnald domino de Ile' as the most powerful lords of the diocese [*Chronicle of Man and the Sudreys* (1257–1376), ed. P.A. Munch (Christiana, 1860), 148, 165–166 [Appendix no.17]].

66 *CDS*, iii, no 1576; *Foedera*, iii, 277.

67 *RRS*, v, no 165.

extended patronage about this time to MacDougall's regional allies, Gilbert of Glassary (another former Balliol Man) and Archibald Campbell of Lochawe.⁶⁸ Such was David's personal favour to John MacDougall at this time that historians have speculated that David might even have considered his issue as another Anglophile alternative to a Stewart royal succession.⁶⁹ More realistically, the king could at least hope to encourage MacDougall and his neighbours to make life difficult for MacDonald; as Abbot Walter Bower's later chronicle put it: 'by persuading and inducing one chieftain to kill or capture [another one]...'.⁷⁰

It says much for lingering loyalties to the MacDougalls after a forty year absence, allied to resentment of aggressive MacDonald lordship, that John *Gallda* was able to recover a core of lands. John of Islay seems to have had no option but to recognise this reality as long as MacDougall was at the same time willing to concede his regional dominance. On 8 September 1354, indeed, the two men had sealed a detailed bond of peace.⁷¹ This saw MacDonald retain control over specified islands, castles and churches within the former MacDougall patrimony first forfeited by Robert I. As such, MacDonald may have viewed the declaration to treat his former enemy as a 'brother' as a pragmatic concession banked against the return of David II (one possibly mediated, again, by Robert Stewart). In doing so the Lord of the Isles perhaps remained confident of his ability, as ever, to limit the immediate impact of Crown interference on the ground in the west. After all, he certainly made sure to balance his kindred's prospects – as in past crises – in the opposing direction. In October 1357 he would be included in the Treaty of Berwick for David's release as an ally of Edward III. This ensured MacDonald exemption from both the taxation necessary to raise annual ransom instalments (at first, 10,000 merks a year for ten years) and nomination this time as a valuable hostage if any such instalment was defaulted: he also secured trading licences in England and Ireland for six of his named merchants (including a John of Portrush and a William of Ulster).⁷²

68 *RRS*, v, nos 166, 183–184; *RMS*, i, Appendix ii, nos 1136–1137, 1139, 1144, 1171–1172, 1183, 1216–1217; J.W.M. Bannerman, 'The Lordship of the Isles – Historical Background', in K.A. Steer and J.W.M. Bannerman (eds), *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture in the West Highlands* (Edinburgh, 1977), 204–208; *HP*, i, 75–78, and ii, 119, 142–143.

69 *ER*, ii, 106, 114, 173; Boardman, 'The Tale of Leper John', 232. Fordun's contemporary annals insert the MacDougall-Bruce marriage alongside material for 1350–2 [*Chron Fordun*, i, 369].

70 *Chron Bower*, vii, 359–361.

71 *HP*, i, 76–78; *ALI*, xxvii–xxviii, 5–8.

72 *CDS*, iii, nos 1606, 1639, 1657; *RRS*, v, nos 148–150. Tellingly in May 1357, Lord John had been in the frame again as a hostage [*CDS*, iii, no. 1629]. John also had a safe-conduct to England from autumn 1357 [*Rotuli Scotiae*, i, 811].

Lord John's actions, however, may also betray his extreme nervousness about a controversial, unpredictable element introduced to Scottish political affairs by the second Bruce king by c.1350 and pursued with something close to obsession over the next two decades. In lieu of a hefty ransom, David II sought to buy off the English with a place for one of Edward III's younger sons in the Scottish royal succession, at once undermining the Stewarts and boosting royal authority over wider regional magnate interests by reducing the need for regular parliamentary taxation. This unsettling plan was discussed and rejected by the Scottish political community on at least three occasions – 1352, 1359 and 1364 – but still had substantial support from elements across all three estates, encouraging David to persist. At first, Edward III's second son, David's nephew, John of Gaunt, married in to the Duchy of Lancaster by 1359, seemed the favoured prince for this deal. Yet both English chronicler Henry Knighton and the *Scotichronicon* of Abbot Bower, the latter writing in the 1440s but with access to royal records and narrative material contemporary to David's reign, assert that in fact Edward's third son, Lionel, duke of Clarence (born 1338), was considered as an alternative heir presumptive.⁷³

This twist on the Bruces' co-operation with the Anglo-Norman Ulster lordship of 1286, c.1302 and the 1320s might thus have impacted upon the MacDonald Lordship as well as the Stewartry. For from 1347 Lionel was fourth Earl of Ulster as well as Lord of Connacht, wed to David II's second cousin, Elizabeth de Burgh, daughter of the slain third Earl, and appointed as Lieutenant of Ireland in 1361.⁷⁴ If David's proposal could be brought to fruition, the resulting alliance – or even any more minor agreements of lordship concluded on its frayed robe-tails – must pose a direct threat to the MacDonalds' continued galloglass activities throughout the Irish Sea world, as well as their regional lordship over the Hebrides and Argyllshire coast.

That these issues did indeed bleed into Bruce-MacDonald-Stewart relations in the 1360s is suggested by John of the Isles' possible involvement in the 'Three Earls' rebellion' of the Stewarts, Douglas and March in spring 1363, although the evidence for this is slight. The rising was provoked in part by David's plans to approach Edward III about reviving his succession-peace plan and once

73 *Chron Bower*, vii, 323; Penman, *David II*, 331–333; Boardman, *The Campbells*, 75–77. The 1365 plan included proposals to cede £2000 worth of Scottish territory to this English Prince, including Galloway and the Isle of Man, a grant which thus could have united the historically linked lordships of northern Ireland and south-west Scotland. Knighton asserts that Edward Balliol resigned his rights in Scotland to Lionel [*Knighton's Chronicle*, 136–137].

74 W.M. Ormrod, *Edward III* (London, 2012), 317–318.

crushed saw the Bruce king confirm to 'John de Insulis', from Edinburgh on 4 July 1363 (just before David left once more for London), all his existing holdings, perhaps by way of pardon.⁷⁵ However, stronger evidence of MacDonald opposition to David's diplomacy is highlighted by the king's further proposal, to a select 'congregation' of mainland nobles at Perth in July 1365 (including John of Lorn and Campbell of Lochawe), that a mutual military alliance be forged with England which would see 'fighting men of those people of Scotland who are within the borders of Scotland and Ireland' obliged to serve the English Crown in Ireland for three months a year for between five and 15 years.⁷⁶ The dispatch of magnates like John of Islay, Robert Steward and William, earl of Ross, on annual military service in Ireland would have been of understandable appeal to David and his close councillors. Yet it may also have been a term sought anxiously and in vain by Clarence's troubled regime in Dublin. The evidence points to continued mercenary activity throughout this period: for 1366–8, the Connacht annalist recorded MacDonald galloglass arriving to take part in O'Neill conflict (with an 'Alexander Mac Domnaill...constable of the gallowglasses' killed); for 1367, after Anglo-Scottish talks had collapsed, near-contemporary English chronicler, John of Reading, reported that Scottish forces plundered Ulster.⁷⁷

As with many of the king's plans c.1350–71 there was more smoke than fire in David's schemes for the west. Unlike his father, the second Bruce monarch did not venture into the Gaidhealtachd, allowing strongholds like Tarbert to fall out of use and failing to provide allies like MacDougall with personal support.⁷⁸ Between 1366 and 1370 John of Islay was cited on several occasions for 'contumacious absence' from Parliament alongside the Earl of Ross and, tellingly, MacDougall.⁷⁹ The Parliament at Scone in July 1366 had seen the estates demand that 'those rebels, namely of Atholl, Argyll, Badenoch, Lochaber and Ross...should be arrested by the king and his armed force to undergo common justice (probably to deal with persistent cattle raiding) and particularly for paying off the [ransom] contribution'.⁸⁰ David and his councillors thus sought

75 *RMS*, i, no 156 and Appendix ii, no 1466; *ALI*, 208 [A5]; *RRS*, v, no 297 [G].

76 *RPS*, 1365/7/1–3.

77 *Annals of Connacht*, 328–329, 334–335; *Chronica Johannis de Reading et Anonymi Cantuariensis, 1346–57*, ed. J. Tait (Manchester, 1914), 184; Nicholls, 'Scottish Mercenary Kindreds in Ireland, 1200–1600', 93.

78 The last recorded Exchequer payments for maintenance at Tarbert relate to the upkeep of the park there in 1330 [*ER*, i, 207, 213, 239, 287].

79 *RPS*, 1366/7/1; 1368/6/1; 1369/3/1; 1370/2/1.

80 *RPS*, 1366/7/10–11 and 15.

to use a simultaneous reassessment of taxable lands and goods in 1366–7 to strip the MacDonalds of their exemption from the ransom levies and to spread the cost of royal finance more evenly (at a time when in fact David had not made a payment to England since 1362 and negotiated the first of two cost reductions and term extensions with Edward III).⁸¹

Later in the year, however, Parliament could only record that the royal assessors had been denied access to MacDonald lands (valued in the thirteenth century at £1,320) just as they had been repelled from the holdings of the Steward, the Earl of Ross, MacDougall and the Campbells of Lochawe.⁸² In the following year, the Crown seemingly sought to apply a Parliamentary revocation of royal grants once again to target the lands of these recalcitrant western lords: MacDonald was charged £400 in re-entry for Lewis, Lochaber and Garmoran, a blatantly higher rate than the fines asked of David's supporters and probably never paid by John of Islay.⁸³ All these efforts spoke ultimately to the continued impotence of the Crown in dealing with the Lordship.

It was not in fact until the last two years of his reign that David was able to demonstrate some authority over Lord John and it is revealing of the balance of political power after 1346/1357 that this first required the king and a realigned royal party to gain a clear stranglehold on the activity of Robert Steward. The heir presumptive, briefly arrested in autumn 1368 along with his fourth son, Alexander of Badenoch, and temporarily deprived of his title to Strathearn, had to stand surety for his son-in-law when John MacDonald submitted in person to King David at Inverness on 15 November 1369.⁸⁴

Through this act John acknowledged past 'negligences' in his execution of justice and promised to obey Crown officers and contribute to the ransom, surrendering two hostages to royal ward.⁸⁵ On vellum this seems an impressive assertion of monarchy. It fulfilled Parliament's restated plea of March 1369 that David 'compel and force with a firm hand in diverse and convenient places John of the Isles and his sons, and others adhering to him...to come to the king's obedience and stand to law, and undergo services and

81 *RPS*, 1366/7/18.

82 In addition, the only exchequer intromission from the sheriffship of Argyll for David II's later reign was a small sum of 'arrears', £39, returned for Jan. 1366 to Jan. 1367 [*ER*, ii, 256]. Similar small sums were also returned for the contribution by the bishopric of the Isles.

83 *RPS*, 1368/2/1-2; *RRS*, v, nos 387–388, 389–390.

84 *ALI*, 8–10 [no 6].

85 *ER*, ii, 344. Alexander III had also taken heirs as hostages from Angus Mòr in 1263 [*ER*, i, 5]; so too had Edward III and Edward Balliol in 1336.

charges with mainlanders'.⁸⁶ In anticipating strategies against the Lordship which would later be deployed by James I in the same location, David was accompanied to his northernmost castle by an impressive retinue of prelates and chivalric nobility headed by Douglasses, Dunbars, Keiths, Lindsays, Erskines and John MacDougall of Lorn who by 1370 would be reinvested as a royal agent in the west through grants of the lordship of Glen Lyon and as baillie of Dull.⁸⁷

Nevertheless, as with a number of David II's confrontations of his regional magnates, there may have been only limited bite to this submission. As in the past David may have been prevented – by the general nervousness of the Estates and the increasing inevitability of a Stewart succession to the childless Bruce king – from going as far as he had really desired in punishing and, surely, forfeiting the Steward and MacDonald of key parts of their patrimony. Indeed, the terms of submission may reflect the Steward's continued ability to limit royal action. The indenture crucially styles John as 'dominus Insularum' (not simply 'de Yle' or 'de Insulis' as in 1343 then 1363). It required John's grandson, Angus, the son of his late eldest son, John, from his first marriage (who had married a Campbell of Lochawe), along with another bastard son, Donald, to be submitted as hostages, thus *not* any of the sons by John's second, Stewart wife. The hostages were kept, moreover, at Dumbarton castle in the care of Sir Robert Erskine, a key royal councillor but also a Stewart tenant and a lord who would prove himself well able to serve both Crown and heir presumptive.

Thus there may have been a large element of compromise attached to the MacDonald submission and it really only allowed David and his supporters to further their mainland territorial agenda in Moray, Lochaber and the Great Glen. The extant royal chamberlain's rolls for 1370–71 certainly return handsome sums intromitted by officials for the former Randolph earldom (although it is not clear if this included Lochaber) and northern Perthshire, but still nothing from the Argyll coast and the Isles.⁸⁸ Finally, MacDonald would once more be amongst those cited for 'contumacious absence' from the very next Parliament at Perth, just over three months later, in late February 1370.⁸⁹ This same assembly urged that in future David spread the cost of supporting the royal household by undertaking 'a stay, at certain and opportune times, in the highland regions, in which he ought and will be able to have more useful prises

86 *RPS*, 1369/3/5-7 and 10 [Highland violence also preventing payment to the Norwegians of the *annum* for the Western Isles].

87 *RMS*, i, no 237 and Appendix ii, no. 1376; *ER*, ii, 295.

88 *ER*, ii, 342, 352, 363, 432.

89 *RPS*, 1370/2/1.

and a better market price, and similarly to pacify the country and to punish malefactors': the MacDonald lands were specifically named in this context alongside those of the Stewarts in Kintyre, Knapdale and Arran, MacDougall of Lorn and the Campbells of Lochawe.⁹⁰

Whatever further action against John of the Isles David II may have intended, his itinerary after Spring 1370 suggests that his health was already in decline and for the remainder of his reign he prioritised the Bruce legacy elsewhere, including a last journey to England. David's death on 22 February 1371 confirmed John of the Isles' evasion of a Bruce monarchy vendetta and the wisdom (and cost) of alignment with the Stewarts. Amongst Stewart's acts as Robert II in the first few years of his reign would be confirmations of MacDonald's former MacRuairi lands as well as re-grants of Lochaber and Kintyre to John and his now royal wife, Margaret Stewart.⁹¹

Conclusion

Through the 'long-fourteenth century', the MacDonald Lordship of the Isles undoubtedly emerged as the dominant power in the west and leading exponent of Gaelic militarised lordship and culture. In doing so, the MacDonald kindred and its allies remained removed from the mainland in many important ways. As a result, the canon of Scottish chroniclers would comment, if with mixed sympathies, on the striking otherness of the Lordship and its caterans during the reigns of the early Stewart monarchs.⁹²

Nevertheless, the difficult course of the Wars of Independence meant that successive MacDonalds had not been able to avoid, and indeed had sought to exploit and experience, interaction and integration with the wider political communities of both the Scottish kingdom and the British Isles.⁹³ Like the Bruces, Stewarts and other rising mainland dynasties, the MacDonalds' success across this period owed as much to their pragmatic choices of lordship – timely switches of adherence, advantageous marriages and negotiated settlements over land and inheritance – as it did to their capacity for violent action; perhaps more so in dealings outwith their regional concerns. Moreover, like the Campbells, the MacDonalds had also benefitted from both Bruce and Stewart sponsorship.

90 *RPS*, 1370/2/8 and 32.

91 *ALI*, 209–211 [A6–A10]. The Stewarts would also absorb MacDougall of Lorn's lands [Boardman, 'The Tale of Leper John'].

92 *Chron Fordun*, i, 24; *Chron Bower*, i, 185; Grant, 'Scotland's Celtic Fringe', 118–120.

93 Oram, 'Lordship of the Isles: 1336–1545', 123–124.

In the context of the 1370s, then, there was surely some expectation of the potential for further MacDonald engagement with royal government and Scottish aristocratic society: that the Gael could be 'loyal and obedient to their king and country, and provided they [are] well governed they are obedient and ready enough to respect the law'.⁹⁴ One telling hint of this is the only recorded ransom 'contribution' payment by John of the Isles to the royal Chamberlain, a sum of £133 6/- 8d, intromitted in 1373.⁹⁵

Yet if this was the hope of some in a generation which now knew John of the Isles as the son-in-law of the new king and brother to several princes of the blood, it was to remain sorely unfulfilled and prove a short aberration. Throughout the majority of the rule of the Bruce monarchs – over six decades, since the first expulsion of the MacDougalls and then the collapse of the Irish campaign in 1318 – the MacDonalds had found themselves at odds with Scottish monarchy. By the 1360s, repeated Parliamentary calls for Crown intervention in the west confirmed the more dramatic view that the 'Highlanders and people of the Islands...are a wild and untamed race, primitive and proud, given to plunder and the easy life...'.⁹⁶ In this regard, it was a final irony that in forcing William, earl of Ross, to resign his earldom and daughter's hand in 1370 to a non-Gael placeman, Sir Walter Leslie, the last Bruce king would also be the one to open the door to further MacDonald expansion east, on a collision course with the Badenoch Stewarts and on a high road to Harlaw.

94 *Chron Fordun*, i, 24.

95 *ER*, ii, 431.

96 *Chron Fordun*, i, 24.

From the River Farrar to the Loire Valley

The MacDonald Lord of the Isles, the Scottish Crown, and International Diplomacy, 1428–1438

Lachlan Nicholson

On 20 February 1437 James I was murdered by a cabal of his own subjects. This spectacular regicide created a crisis in Scotland's domestic politics; the heir to the throne was an infant and no arrangements for a regency were in place. Without an obvious candidate to lead the crown's governmental operations in the absence of an adult monarch, there was perhaps uncertainty as to how the political classes would respond to the new circumstances. The assassinated King James is often judged as an unpopular ruler owing to his acquisitive and interventionist exercise of royal lordship and his reign has been linked with tyranny. His sudden death was followed by a degree of political fractiousness with several high-profile magnate feuds developing from grievances dating back to his reign. His murder also had implications for international relations. From the late 1420s James had been engaged in substantial diplomatic contact with the French and English crowns respectively, both of whom sought Scottish support during a pivotal phase of the Hundred Years War. James finally committed to a pro-French policy and declared war on England and this state of Anglo-Scottish war still existed when he was killed. The royal murder therefore raised emergency questions over national governance and unfinished foreign policy.

It was against this backdrop of political crisis and international war that Alexander MacDonald, Lord of the Isles – a powerful magnate with a tumultuous career – experienced several dramatic changes in fortune. By Scottish standards a massive geo-political bloc, the Lordship of the Isles by this date spanned the Northern and Southern Hebrides, the lordships of Garmoran and Lochaber, Morvern, Knoydart, the Kintyre peninsula, and Arran. Throughout his career MacDonald's relations with central government fluctuated between outright hostility and close cooperation. Opposed to the Albany regency, he allied briefly with James I in the mid 1420s, before a civil war between Clan Donald and James escalated in the late 1420s. From 1428 until 1431, royalist and Clan Donald armies clashed on several occasions and twice in this period, Alexander suffered defeat, humiliation, and imprisonment. Yet despite these disastrous setbacks Alexander enjoyed a remarkable turnaround. By the 1430s not only was he at liberty with his vast lordship intact, but had also acquired the earldom of Ross and had been appointed Justiciar for the North – one the crown's

most important regional agents. The climax of Alexander's career had been reached and so had the apogee of Clan Donald expansion.

The transformation of Alexander from supposed recalcitrant enemy of the crown to trusted royal law enforcer has been highlighted in a number of recent historical studies and certainly provides a 'happy ending' to his career.¹ The conflict between him and James I has been attributed to a power-struggle over the earldom of Ross, to which both men had a claim. This has been discussed in terms of a regional tussle in which expanding royal and local lordship clashed. The wealthy earldom of Ross was undoubtedly a core factor in the civil war but a less appreciated aspect to crown-Clan Donald relations in this period is concurrent developments in international war and diplomacy. James I's war in the Highlands coincided with key diplomatic manoeuvres on the international stage that had a direct bearing on Alexander's fortunes.

James and Clan Donald, 1428–31

In the mid-1420s James I was on good terms with Alexander MacDonald. In 1425 the king had made a ruthless assault on his kinsmen and domestic rivals, the Albany Stewarts. To complete their destruction James sought support from magnates, including MacDonald, who were prepared to back his action. MacDonald was probably one of several magnates who attended an assize that judged against – and ultimately destroyed – the Albany Stewarts.² In return for his loyalty MacDonald probably hoped to obtain royal support for his claims to the earldom of Ross, which the Albany Stewarts had opposed since 1402. As an incentive the king may have confirmed MacDonald as the heir to Ross because, by 1426, Alexander was styled 'Master of the earldom of Ross'.³ Although the ultimate possession of the earldom was not settled at this time, the matter was not openly disputed between MacDonald and the king.

From this point the relationship between the two men rapidly deteriorated. It has been suggested that royal attitudes towards MacDonald had begun to

1 R.D. Oram, 'The Lordship of the Isles, 1336–1545', in D. Ormand (ed), *The Argyll Book* (Edinburgh, 2006), 123–139; M. Brown, *James I* (East Linton, 1994), 93–109; S Kingston, *Ulster and the Isles in the Fifteenth Century: the Lordship of the Clan Donald of Antrim* (Dublin, 2004).

2 R. Tanner, *The Late Medieval Scottish Parliament: Politics and the Three Estates, 1424–1488* (East Linton, 2001), 18–19.

3 Tanner, *Parliament*, 19; Brown, *James I*, 58.

harden as early as 1427,⁴ but it was not until 1428 that conflict truly escalated, albeit in peculiar style. Over July and August of that year, James and the royal household travelled to and based itself at Inverness. The king's entourage was apparently not military in nature but more akin to a royal progress in the north. Arrangements had been made for him to meet with MacDonald in person at Inverness Castle, as well as other Highlands chiefs associated with Clan Donald. For MacDonald this may have looked like a peaceable, formal meeting where the earldom of Ross would be an obvious agenda item. The event was, however, an audacious royal ambush. As each attendee, including MacDonald and his mother, were summoned they were individually arrested at royal command.⁵ Although achieved with a large degree of duplicity the mass arrest of around 50 Highland chiefs, and almost the entire leadership of Clan Donald, was clearly intended as unequivocal display of royal might.

A handful of prisoners were executed, but Alexander was imprisoned until about spring 1429. Perhaps judging that MacDonald had fully acquiesced to royal authority, James released Alexander on his promise of good behaviour. Immediately upon his release, however, MacDonald broke that promise and launched a retaliatory attack by burning the burgh of Inverness. The attackers failed to take the castle – the venue of MacDonald's arrest – but Clan Donald's opposition to James I and his actions at Inverness was affirmed.⁶ Rather than impose incontestable royal supremacy in the Highlands, James had instigated civil war in the north and west.

In response to this challenge to his authority James I personally led a royal army into the Highlands. It was probably in Lochaber that Alexander was confronted by the king's force. With some of his own supporters defecting rather than bear arms against the king, Alexander surrendered and was incarcerated for a second time in two years.⁷ Once again, however, James was unable to capitalize on his triumph over Clan Donald and his intervention in the West Highlands came to a disastrous finale. With Alexander in his second term of imprisonment, his nephew Donald Balloch spearheaded Clan Donald military resistance against the king and embarked upon his lifelong opposition to the crown. In September 1431 James I attempted to secure greater control in the West Highlands by sending an army into Lochaber under the command of Alexander Stewart earl of Mar, his cousin and principal agent in the north and also the chief

4 The royal castle at Inverness was strengthened in 1427 (*RMS*, ii, no. 53) and this has been interpreted as a prelude to Crown aggression. Tanner, *Parliament*, 39; Brown, *James I*, 95.

5 *Chron Bower*, viii, 259–261; Brown, *James I*, 97–98.

6 Brown, *James I*, 97–101.

7 Brown, *James I*, 101–102.

opponent of MacDonald expansion,. The royalist force was routed; Mar just escaped, but Alan Stewart earl of Caithness was killed. Meanwhile, a second royalist army led by Donald Dubh, head of the MacKay kin, was defeated in Strathnaver.⁸ These defeats ignominiously ended the king's aggression in the Highlands.

In the late 1420s, then, civil war had erupted between Clan Donald and the crown. Three years of subsequent conflict had seen initial royal successes completely negated and the king's Highland policies had resulted in significant and high-profile failure. Moreover, the issues concerning the earldom of Ross remained unresolved while the military defeats were damaging to James I's credibility in the Three Estates who were reluctant to meet his demands for additional tax levies to fund a further expedition into the Highlands.⁹

England and France

At the same time as pursuing his ill-fated Highland projects, James I was heavily involved in international diplomacy. James had spent eighteen years as a prisoner in England following his capture as a child whilst on route to France in 1406; he only returned to Scotland in 1424 when his personal rule began. His release was accompanied by a seven-year Anglo-Scottish truce,¹⁰ marriage to Joan Beaufort, and a ransom payment of £40,000.¹¹ The chief function of the truce was to secure Scottish neutrality in the Hundred Years War, for prior to 1424 the Scots had provided substantial military support to Charles VII of France. Between 1419 and 1424, an estimated 15,000 Scottish troops were dispatched to France to fight against the English,¹² the main armies being commanded by the leading Scottish magnates, Archibald, 4th earl of Douglas and John Stewart, 2nd earl of Buchan. The truce agreement of 1424 was successful, at least in the short-term, by ending this Scottish support for France. For several years after 1424 James was preoccupied with establishing his personal

8 Brown, *James I*, 137–139; Oram, 'Lordship', 133; *Chron Bower*, viii, 265–267.

9 *APS*, ii, 20.

10 *Foedera*, x, 326–332.

11 Joan was the daughter of John Beaufort, 1st earl of Somerset, half niece of Henry IV, and niece of Cardinal Henry Beaufort, bishop of Winchester.

12 M. Brown, *The Black Douglasses*, (East Linton, 1998), 216; B.L.G. Ditcham, 'Mutton Guzzlers and Wine Bags: Foreign Soldiers and Native Reactions in Fifteenth Century France', in C.T. Allmand (ed.), *Power, Culture, and Religion in France* (Woodbridge, 1989), 1–13.

royal lordship in a kingdom where a regency government had operated for almost two decades. James had other priorities and did not send more troops to the continent where Buchan and Douglas had been killed in August 1424 at the battle of Verneuil in Normandy. For the English, then, the truce had achieved its intended result; the immediate threat of continued Franco-Scottish military co-operation had been removed.

Anglo-Scottish tensions persisted, however, particularly over James' ransom. Although money was raised to go towards the payments, only a fraction of the agreed sum was ever handed over. This was a matter of considerable irritation for the English who needed funds to subsidize their war effort in France.¹³ Consequently, the English pressurized James on the issue but it is questionable whether he had the ability to raise the cash in full as his calls for taxation were met with steadily mounting opposition from the Three Estates.¹⁴ Far more alarming to the English, however, were French diplomatic approaches to the Scottish king. After suffering a string of strategic military defeats by the English, Charles VII was desperate to rekindle Franco-Scottish military cooperation. In April 1428, a high-profile French embassy, including René de Chartres archbishop of Rheims, John Stewart of Darnley, and the royal poet and chronicler, Alan Chartier, arrived in Scotland. They offered an extraordinary diplomatic package intended to prise James I from his English alliance. In exchange for military aid, Charles offered a royal marriage between the Stewart and Valois dynasties as well as the French duchy of Saintonge.¹⁵ This was a highly attractive enticement for the Scottish king that would also allow him to abandon his ransom obligations to the English. In July 1428, James agreed to renew the Franco-Scottish alliance, marry his eldest daughter Margaret to the Dauphin Louis, and send 6000 troops to France before February 1430.¹⁶

The Franco-Scottish alliance forced the English government to reappraise its strategy towards Scotland. With their priority being to consolidate recent military successes in France, the English needed to avoid the possibility of opening a second theatre of war on the Anglo-Scottish border. A hard-hitting English embassy led by Henry Beaufort, Cardinal of St Eusebius and uncle of James's wife Queen Joan, was ordered to travel north to meet with James at

13 Only 9500 marks had been paid by 1427. *PPC*, iii, 260.

14 *PPC*, iii, 259–265; *CDS*, iv, 1031; Much of the revenues raised were used for aggrandizement rather than the ransom. Tanner, *Parliament*, 53.

15 R. Nicholson, *Scotland: the Later Middle Ages* (Edinburgh, 1975), 289.

16 *APS*, ii, 26–28. Margaret and Louis were betrothed in December 1428 and the treaty was ratified in Edinburgh on 4 March 1429.

Coldingham in February 1429.¹⁷ Beaufort had previously played a key role in negotiating James' release and his brief in 1429 was to use the personal bond created by his family links with the Scottish king to persuade him to adhere to the truce agreement of 1424.¹⁸ The discussions do not seem to have led to any significant outcomes but Anglo-Scottish diplomacy continued throughout 1429 and 1430.¹⁹ The consistent themes of the discussions were breaches of the truce, ransom payments and hostage transfers, and a renewal of the truce, while the possibility of an Anglo-Scottish royal marriage was also raised.

A keystone of James's stance in negotiations was insistence that any truce with England would be restricted on land, thereby excluding France. Thus James hoped to retain the option of sending troops to the continent in accordance with the Franco-Scottish agreement.²⁰ With the current Anglo-Scottish truce due to expire on 1 May 1431 and with a dramatic French military resurgence led by Joan of Arc, the need to reach an agreement with James became more pressing for the English. The Privy Council records show the English government's predicament in dealing with the Scots in 1429–30: a truce with the Scots was urgently sought, but the concession of allowing James freedom to support the French war effort was considered too great to make; nor would the English entertain a marriage alliance when Princess Margaret had already been promised to the Dauphin.²¹ With these topics being thrashed out throughout 1430, a five-year truce was finally concluded on 15 December 1430.²²

International Diplomacy and the Earldom of Ross

Historians have commented that James I was in a strong diplomatic position in the late 1420s and early 1430s. Two of the largest and supposedly strongest western European powers were in competition for his support and James shrewdly entertained both yet committed to neither, attempting to elicit the

17 *PPC*, iii, 318–319; *Foedera*, x, 410; *Rotuli Scotiae*, ii, 264; *CDS*, iv, 1019. The embassy also included the Bishops of Durham and Carlisle, the earl of Northumberland, and Sir Robert Umfraville.

18 *Foedera*, x, 408–409; 419–423. Receipts for 1500 marks from James were drawn up.

19 *Rotuli Scotiae*, ii 265–267; *PPC*, iii, 73–74, 324; *PPC*, iv, 19–27, 346–350; *CDS*, iv, 1030; E.W.M. Balfour-Melville, *James I, King of Scots, 1406–37* (London, 1936), 182–183.

20 *PPC*, iii, 73–74.

21 *PPC*, iv, 16, 19–27, 53–54, 68, 73–75; C. Macrae, 'The English Council and Scotland in 1430', *EHR*, liv (1939), 415–426.

22 *Foedera*, x, 482–484; *CDS*, iv, 19–27.

most advantageous offer. Within two years James had clinched a prestigious royal marriage with the house of Valois and acquired French landed interests, yet still concluded a truce with England that effectively wiped out his ransom arrears. He even pushed for a marriage alliance with the House of Lancaster and made demands regarding land restrictions to apply to the Anglo-Scottish truce. That he could adopt this dogmatic stance with both of these major powers reflects the reality of the diplomatic weakness of the English and French crowns during a period of rapidly changeable military superiority in the Hundred Years War.

Yet there were glaring insecurities in James's own position that have been overlooked by historians, principally in relation to the war in the Highlands. The inconclusive conflict with Clan Donald was an embarrassment to the Scottish king in domestic circles but it also created a weakness in international relations, particularly with England. The Anglo-Scottish truce of 1430 has been described as a diplomatic triumph for the Scots in that it allowed scope for James I, despite English reluctance, to continue sending military aid to France.²³ To allow this, James had demanded that the truce should be limited on land, excluding France, and geographical parameters were indeed included in the agreement. The truce applied generally at sea but was only in force within designated land boundaries. In the south, the land boundary marker was St Michael's Mount, a significant fortification on a tidal island reached by a natural causeway from the Cornish coast. The Mount was a significant navigational feature and was clearly included in the agreement to represent the southern extremity of the English kingdom. The truce, however, also included a northerly boundary – the River Farrar, described as dividing Moray and the earldom of Ross.²⁴ Effectively this clause meant that Ross was outwith the zone where the truce was in force, as were the sprawling territories of the Lordship of the Isles. Thus the English were free to negotiate with Clan Donald in the same way as the Scots could interfere in France. The inclusion of the land boundary clause completely re-adjusts perceptions of James I's

23 Nicholson, *Middle Ages*, 291; Brown, *James I*, 131; P.J. Bradley, 'Anglo-Scottish Relations During the Fifteenth Century, 1399–1485' (unpublished PhD thesis, Emory University, 1983), 153–154.

24 *Foedera*, x, 688–694; *Rot. Scot.*, ii, 272. The River Farrar was the former name for the modern-day River Beaulieu and was an established boundary between Moray and Ross. A. Grant, 'The Province of Ross and the Kingdom of Alba' in E.J. Cowan and R.A. McDonald (eds), *Alba. Celtic Scotland in the Medieval Era* (East Linton, 2000), 88–90; A. Ross, 'The Province of Moray, c.1000–1230' (Unpublished PhD. dissertation, University of Aberdeen, 2003), 11–40. A section of the River Beaulieu, however, still retains the name Farrar.

diplomatic position. The exclusion of Ross and the Lordship of the Isles was an enormous concession that presumably also meant that the English recognized Alexander MacDonald's claims to the earldom. It may also mean that by default James was effectively forced into accepting MacDonald's claims as well.

The axis of Clan Donald and the English Crown posed a considerable security threat to James I. The risks were underscored by the re-emergence at this time of an old political enemy of the Scottish king. James Stewart, or James the Fat, was the last representative of the Albany Stewart dynasty. The son of Duke Murdac whom James I had executed, and also a potential claimant to the Scottish throne, he had been a political exile in Ulster since James I had destroyed the rest of the Albany kin in 1425.²⁵ Provocatively, James the Fat was harboured in Antrim by none other than Alexander MacDonald's uncle, John Mor of Dunivaig.²⁶ In 1425 James the Fat had led a brief rebellion that, although unsuccessful, revealed him to be a possible focal point for opponents of James I.²⁷ The Scottish king recognized the threat and legislation was passed in 1426 that prohibited unauthorized contact with rebels in Ireland.²⁸ James I's concerns were realized in March 1429 when the English government attempted to contact James the Fat and his nephews and have them transferred to England.²⁹ It is not certain whether contact was made or if discussions took place but James the Fat did not go to England. Around the same time in early 1429, however, which is when Alexander MacDonald was released and sacked Inverness, a Clan Donald fleet arrived in Ulster to carry James to Scotland as a dynastic rival to the Scottish king.³⁰

The attempts to deploy James Stewart as a pretender did not materialize as he died sometime in early 1429 but the threat to James I on the western seaboard and the Irish Sea was made apparent. It has also been assumed by historians that the approaches made to James the Fat by the English and Clan Donald were separate or even rival bids for a political pawn. James the Fat, however, may have been the link between the two powers and that there was

25 *Chron Bower*, viii, 245; Brown, *James I*, 66–67.

26 Oram, 'Lordship', 133.

27 Brown, *James I*, 101.

28 *APS*, ii, 11.

29 *PPC*, iii, 327. The official was William Troutbeck, who was paid 100 merks. Two of James the Fat's nephews, Andrew and Murdac Stewart, who had joined their uncle in exile, were issued an English safe-conduct in 1437. *Rotuli Scotiae*, ii, 300.

30 Brown, *James I*, 101; A. Cosgrove (ed.), *A New History of Ireland: Medieval Ireland* (Oxford, 1087), 576; *Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland, by the Four Masters*, ed. J. O'Donovan (Dublin, 1856), vol. iv, 874–875.

collusion between the English government and Clan Donald cannot be ruled out.

Crown-Clan Donald Relations

James I's motives for attacking the Lord of the Isles are not fully understood. Unchecked private feuds in the Highlands, the maintenance of James the Fat in Ulster, as well as MacDonald's adoption of the title 'Lord of the earldom of Ross', have all been cited as provocation to the king. It has also been suggested, rather vaguely, that a 'cold war' simply developed, almost inferring a fatalistic inevitability of crown-Lordship rivalry.³¹ Yet no single discernible event can be said to have incited James to take such extreme and high-risk action, particularly when he was being drawn into the grander arena of international politics.

What does seem clear, however, is that the decision to attack the Lord of the Isles was made at the General Council at Perth in July 1428. A letter written by James Haldenstone, Prior of St Andrews, mentions there was debate between the king and the estates at the General Council on whether to take action against MacDonald. Despite opposition, the king reportedly asserted that:

I shall go and I will see whether they have fulfilled their required service; I shall go I say and I will not return while they default. I will chain them so that they are unable to stand and will lie beneath my feet.³²

Notwithstanding its exaggerated tone, this account confirms that action against MacDonald was settled at the meeting. The letter makes no mention, however, of the earldom of Ross. The 'required service' cited as justification for the campaign is a frustratingly vague term, which may or may not refer to difficulty in extracting homage.³³ This General Council does not appear to have been legislative in nature; instead it was a forum in which the estates deliberated diplomatic policy and it was there that the Scots also agreed to renew the Franco-Scottish alliance.³⁴ The French embassy was received into the General Council and it was decided to send Scottish ambassadors to France to ratify the agreement.³⁵

31 Oram, 'Lordship', 133; Brown, *James I*, 93–95.

32 *Copiale Prioratus Sanctiandree* ed J H Baxter (Oxford, 1930), 49.

33 Tanner, *Parliament*, 40.

34 Tanner, *Parliament*, 38–39.

35 *APS*, ii, 26–28.

Those who attended the General Council meeting in Perth could not have been unaware that renewing the French alliance was a profoundly provocative contravention of the Anglo-Scottish truce of 1424. It was perhaps also understood that in such circumstances, Clan Donald with its connections in Ulster and with James the Fat as well as a political axe to grind over Ross, would be an obvious target for English counter-diplomacy. There was, after all, precedent for co-operation between the Lords of the Isles and the English government during previous phases of political turbulence.³⁶ It would also make sense, therefore, if James I's strategy towards the Lord of the Isles and his international dealings were closely linked at this time. If so, then this might help explain the rather bizarre pre-emptive nature of the mass arrest in Inverness of the Clan Donald leadership, which was perhaps intended to shore up a perceived breach in James' international posturing.

It is also worth noting that the king's treatment of Alexander MacDonald differed from the way in which other political opponents were handled. Whereas the Duke of Albany was executed on specious grounds associated with rebellion, MacDonald was freed even after leading an armed revolt whilst on a promise of good behaviour. During Alexander's first imprisonment, James apparently tried to install an alternative – and perhaps more compliant – head of Clan Donald. In the winter of 1428 James made an approach to John Mor of Dunivaig and Antrim who was *tánaiste* to the Lordship and had once attempted a coup to replace the senior MacDonald line in the 1380s and 1390s.³⁷ It was John who sheltered James the Fat in Ulster and he was arrested at Inverness in 1428 but subsequently released. Any designs on establishing a successor to Alexander came to nothing, however, as John Mor was apparently killed by the royal agent who was sent to negotiate with him.³⁸ Nevertheless, this episode shows that James I was clearly anxious to install a leader of the Lordship of the Isles who was more assuredly loyal and who would neutralize both the lingering shadow of James the Fat and any scope for future collusion with the English crown.

Ultimately, however, James I had little option but to revert to Alexander MacDonald. Alexander endured a stage-managed public surrender to the king in 1431 but this seems to have brought about a reconciliation, or at least marked the end of the civil war.³⁹ The earldom of Ross, managed by Mar until he died

36 *ALI*, nos. 2, 15.

37 Oram, 'Lordship', 130; A Grant, *Independence and Nationhood, 1306–1469* (Edinburgh, 1996), 211–213; Kingston, *Ulster*, 68.

38 Brown, *James I*, 101–102; For a fresh appraisal of the identity and death of John Mor, see S. Boardman, *The Campbells, 1250–1513* (Edinburgh, 2006), 127–128.

39 *Chron Bower*, viii, 263–265.

in 1435, subsequently passed to MacDonald.⁴⁰ Alexander may have convinced James I of his loyalty but he was now also the most logical successor to the earldom.⁴¹ His acquisition of Ross had, after many years of strife, come about peaceably and for the remainder of James I's reign the king seems to have left MacDonald unchallenged. With the dispute at an end, James once again turned his attention to the international stage.

A second turning point in Scottish diplomacy followed the Congress of Arras in 1436. This international conference was intended to bring together French, English, and Burgundian diplomats to discuss a settlement. Instead, the English embassy abandoned the talks allowing the French and Burgundians to conclude an alliance which excluded England.⁴² In the summer of the following year, James declared war against England and led an abortive attack on Roxburgh Castle, one of the few remaining Scottish border strongholds still held and garrisoned by English since the 1340s. The war ceased, however, after James I's assassination in February 1437. Thereafter conflict on the Anglo-Scottish border de-escalated, perhaps indicating that local truces had been agreed while negotiations between the two governments went ahead throughout 1437.

A full Anglo-Scottish truce was finally concluded in March 1438.⁴³ It was to last from 1 May 1438 until 1 May 1447 and was to be enforced by a bipartisan commission of conservators. The terms of the agreement, like previous Anglo-Scottish truces, pledged to deal with potential sources of friction such as maritime and border crime but, like the agreement of 1430, the land boundaries of St Michael's Mount and the River Farrar were used.⁴⁴ The repetition of this clause obviously meant that the concession to the Scots of their having scope to aid France, complimented by English access to the Lordship of the Isles, was still on the table. Clearly the mistrust between Scotland and England had not died with James I.

By the time the truce was ratified, however, the rapprochement between the Scottish Crown and Alexander MacDonald was complete. He had become earl of Ross and in 1438 he met in Knapdale with the earl of Douglas, the principal leader of the council governing the kingdom on behalf of the infant James II.

40 MacDonald was styled earl of Ross in a charter by 1436.

41 Although after his release, MacDonald took revenge on the MacLeans and MacIntoshes who had opposed him with the royalists.

42 J.G. Dickinson, *The Congress of Arras* (Oxford, 1983).

43 *Rotuli Scotiae*, ii, 307; *Foedera*, x, 688–694.

44 In the texts of the truce agreements and subsequent memoranda in 1442 and 1444, both rivers are referred to as 'inter Moraviam et Rossiam', *Foedera* x, 688–689, ix, 4, 58.

What was discussed is uncertain, but by 1439 Alexander had been appointed justiciar north of the Forth.⁴⁵ The former enemy of the Crown had become an indisputable part of the central government apparatus.

Conclusion

James I's attack on Clan Donald is generally viewed as one of his most damaging interventions of his personal rule. It led to a messy, inconclusive civil war in the Highlands that provoked parliamentary hostility and undermined his leadership. Yet the seriousness of the crisis has, if anything, been hitherto underplayed. That the conflict became absorbed into Anglo-Scottish diplomacy, with the Scots forced to concede that Ross and the Lordship of the Isles were excluded from international truce agreements, magnifies the scale of James I's failures in the Highlands. Incorporation of the relatively obscure local boundary of the River Farrar into the truce of 1430 thrust the troubled crown-MacDonald interface well beyond the domestic sphere, providing the English crown with a potent negotiating lever against the Scottish king. It may have even stalled James from pursuing his ambitions with France at that time. The situation outlived James, with the land boundary clause used again in Anglo-Scottish negotiations the year after his death in 1438.

Traditionally the earldom of Ross has been perceived as the lynchpin of the crown-Clan Donald conflict. Geographically the largest Scottish earldom with strategic importance, Ross was of enormous value in the kingdom's geo-political map, which perhaps explains why rivalries grew so intense. MacDonald's encroachments into Ross and his family's protection of James the Fat would have provided ample provocation for the Scottish king to strike. Yet James initiated the campaign against MacDonald at precisely the same time as deciding on a crucial departure in foreign policy. By concluding the French alliance in 1428, James I breached the terms of his release and the Anglo-Scottish truce of 1424. The provocative pro-French defection could expect a retaliatory English response. A significant weakness in James's bullish foreign diplomacy was the Lordship of the Isles, one of the remotest parts of the kingdom where direct royal authority was light, and which contained disaffected elements the English could potentially exploit.

The evidence is perhaps largely circumstantial, but it seems likely the war in the Highlands and James's international ambitions overlapped from the

45 F.M. Powicke and F.B. Fryde (eds), *Handbook of British Chronology* (London, 1961), 519; Nicholson, *Later Middle Ages*, 327–328; Tanner, *Parliament*, 90.

outset. His extraordinary assault on MacDonald and the mass arrest of over 50 Highlands chiefs in 1428 was perhaps designed as a pre-emptive strike to strengthen him in an area of weakness, perceived or otherwise, in his strategy with France and England – as well as a check on MacDonald's expansion in Ross. James I's apparent attempt to establish a loyal alternative head of Clan Donald to replace Alexander would also fit with this agenda.

There had been occasional collusion between Clan Donald and the English government during the fourteenth and earlier fifteenth centuries during periods of acute political friction between the Scottish Crown and the Lordship.⁴⁶ Yet if such an agreement was made during the 1430s, then it did not lead to coordinated military action against the Scottish Crown and neither government activated the boundary clause in this period. Both James I and the minority council of James II came to accept Alexander's regional strength. MacDonald, now unequivocally integrated into the kingdom's political elite, demonstrated willingness to work within the legal and judicial fabric of central government. In fact, it has been asserted that the 'unparalleled accord' of government-Clan Donald relations in this period 'made real an entirely new model of lordship based on co-operation with the Crown'.⁴⁷ It has been disproved that Alexander MacDonald – 'a man born to much trouble all of his lifetime' was the antithesis of a Gaidhealtachd separatist; but there is perhaps a degree of irony that his accession to the high political establishment was achieved by the defeat of a 'civilizing' Anglicized monarch committed to strong centralized government.

46 *Rotuli Scotiae*, ii, 94–95; *CDS*, iv, no 876; *Calendar of Close Rolls, 1422–61*, ed., A E Stamp et al, 6 vols (London, 1933–47), 108, 369; A. Grant, 'Scotland's Celtic Fringe in the Later Middle Ages: The MacDonald Lords of the Isles and the Kingdom of Scotland' in R.R. Davies (ed.), *The British Isles, 1100–1500: Comparisons, Contrasts and Connections* (Edinburgh, 1988), 118–140; J. Bannerman, 'The Lordship of the Isles' in J. Brown (ed.), *Scottish Society in the Fifteenth Century* (London, 1977), 215.

47 S. Kingston, *Ulster*, 78.

Ghille Chattan Mhor and *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* Lands in the Clann Dhomhnail Lordship of Lochaber¹

Alasdair Ross

On 17 October 1895 in the Blythswood Rooms in Glasgow in front of a packed audience of people interested in *Clann Chatain* (Clan Chattan) history, the historian and antiquarian Charles Fraser Mackintosh regaled his audience with a potted history of his mother's kindred. In this address, Mackintosh informed his audience that 1291 was the 'real' historical horizon of 'his' clan because King Edward I, the ultimate bogey-man for many Scots, had stolen all of the valuable Scottish charters on that date. According to Mackintosh, this meant that pre-1291 Scottish history was prehistoric because there was no evidence.

Despite the unwelcome attentions of Edward I, Mackintosh nevertheless felt able to inform his audience about a number of key 'facts'. The first of these facts was that between 1000 and 1100 a person by the name of *Ghille Chattan Mhor* had lived in Lochaber and that either he or his immediate descendants were the lords of Glen Lui and Loch Arkaig, these lands held of the Lords of the Isles. In 1291 this line ended in an heiress called Eva. Fortunately for all concerned, that year Eva married Angus Mackintosh, the sixth chief of that name and a direct descendant of an early earl of Fife. Following this marriage, the sixteen various kindreds that together comprised the *Clann Chatain* confederacy 'elected' Angus as their chief.

Charles Fraser Mackintosh then provided a quick check-list of post-1291 charters that proved the 'election' of Angus. The first of these consisted of a lost 1333 charter from Reginald of the Isles to William son of Eva in which William was confirmed in the lands of his mother. This grant was later confirmed by King David II (also lost). This was (much) later followed by a charter from John of the Isles and earl of Ross who called a Duncan Mackintosh 'his beloved cousin'; a charter from King James III that referred to the same person as 'Captain of Clan Chattan'; and finally a 1467 bond of manrent between Baron Forbes and the same Duncan Mackintosh that again referred

1 My thanks to Sonja Cameron, Aonghas MacCoinnich and Michael Penman for reading this article in draft and for making useful suggestions. Any mistakes that remain are my own.

to the latter as the ‘Captain of Clan Chattan’.² The discerning reader will already have spotted that there are a number of rather large holes in this tale but the subtext is clear. On one side *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* (the Mackintoshes) were descended from the earls of Fife and their ancestors on the other side had held lands in Lochaber from the Lords of the Isles at an early date.

In fact, the story that Charles Fraser Mackintosh was purporting to relate is more nuanced than he would have us believe. There is little doubt that any investigation would be helped if the origins of *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* were known because that would provide a genuine historic horizon from which their later actions could be assessed. Accordingly, this paper will begin by evaluating the information relating to the putative origins of the kindred contained in Mackintosh and other manuscripts against the surviving historical evidence. It will then assess the allegiances and holdings of *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. It must have been difficult for the kindred to hold major lands in Lochaber from the Lords of the Isles and simultaneously negotiate a path through the largely treacherous ground that comprised relations between the Lord of the Isles and the Scottish crown during that time period.

Mac an Tòisich – The Son of the Thane?

The usual starting point for all *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* history is a manuscript now called the Kinrara ms. This was written in 1679 by Lachlan Mackintosh of Kinrara, and he partly based his text upon three earlier manuscripts by Farquhar Mackintosh (from Duncan, 3rd earl of Fife, to 1496; composed 1502); Andrew Weaver (MacPhail), parson of Croy, (from Duncan, third earl of Fife, to the death of William Mackintosh at Strathbogie in 1550; composed c.1550); and George Munro, who only wrote about three Mackintoshes (Farquhar Mackintosh, William Mackintosh who was killed in Inverness, and Lachlan *oig* Mackintosh, murdered in 1524; composed 1575).³ The originals of these earlier manuscripts have been lost, so little can now be said about either the accuracy of

2 Charles Fraser Mackintosh, *Address on the History of Clan Chattan* (Oban, 1895), 1–15. This paper is not the place to properly investigate *Clann Chatain*, who are first recorded (by inference) in a Gordon document dated October 1442 [NAS, GD176/7]. There do, however, seem to be very close links between *Clann Chatain* and the Gordons and it may be that the confederacy was a vehicle through which the Gordons could aggressively expand their lordship in Highland Scotland (also see fn57).

3 MacFarlane, *Genealogical* i, 148]; M Macgregor, ‘Writing the History of Gaelic Scotland: A Provisional Checklist of “Gaelic” Genealogical Histories’, *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, 24 (2008), 357–379, at 364.

transmission from them to the Kinrara manuscript or how they were compiled and edited by Lachlan.

A little more can be said about some of the authors and biases. The first manuscript abruptly stopped in 1496, and this date coincides with the death of Duncan Mackintosh, chief of his kindred. The Kinrara ms identifies the author as Farquhar, Duncan's heir, and states that he wrote it during his seventeen-year incarceration (partly alongside Kenneth MacKenzie, heir of Kintail) by King James IV.⁴ Alison Cathcart has plausibly suggested that the reason behind this long imprisonment was because Farquhar had taken part in a rebellion, led by Alexander MacDonald of Lochalsh, against the MacKenzies in Ross. Thereafter, because both Farquhar and Kenneth were future chiefs, and because both men had MacDonald mothers, the king had been forced into taking preventative action.⁵ The long imprisonment of Farquhar by the crown, together with his presumably increasing desperation to be released, must raise serious questions about possible biases in his original manuscript.

For example, making himself a descendant of Earl Duncan of Fife (MacDuff – who was also allegedly a thane) was an absolute masterstroke. With one sentence Farquhar not only provided himself with putative royal descent from a tenth century king of Alba, Dubh mac Máel Coluim (962–966), but also linked himself and his family to the senior inaugural officials of pre-1329 medieval Scotland who had a long history of supporting the crown.⁶ Farquhar may also have known his local history, even if he got his early earls of Fife confused.⁷ In the late twelfth century Earl Duncan II of Fife (1154–1204) clearly held substantial lands in Strathspey, in the parishes of Kirkmichael, Inveravon, and Advie. These Fife holdings in Strathspey were conveniently close to the later *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* holdings of Moy and (particularly) Dunachton, so it might have seemed unsurprising to many to read that a younger son of an earl of Fife was the progenitor of the Mackintoshes. However, the fallacy of this theory was exposed by W F Skene in 1890 when he rightly argued that the MacDuffs of Fife were only ever called thanes in

4 MacFarlane, *Genealogical*, i, 148. This identification seemed to be questioned but no reason was given for this: M. MacGregor, 'The genealogical histories of Gaelic Scotland', in A. Fox and D. Woolf (eds), *The Spoken Word: Oral Culture in Britain, 1500–1850* (Manchester, 2002), 196–239 at 209.

5 Cathcart, *Kinship and Clientage*, 46.

6 MacFarlane, *Genealogical*, 150–158.

7 J. Bannerman, 'MacDuff of Fife', in A. Grant and K.J. Stringer (eds), *Medieval Scotland: Crown, Lordship and Community* (Edinburgh, 1993), 20–38.

'fabulous' histories of Scotland. In reality, the MacDuff earls of Fife never bore such a title.⁸

Farquhar's manuscript may also have supplied the long list of pre-1496 *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* battle honours that appears in the Kinrara MS, listed below in tabular form.

Date	Mackintosh	King	Pro-crown	Opponents
1163	Shaw	Malcolm IV	yes	Moravians
?	Shaw II	William I	yes	Donald of the Isles
1196	Duncan (killed in action)	William I	yes	Islanders
1211	Malcolm	William I	yes	MacWilliams
1263	Farquhar (married to an Isleswoman and killed by an Islesman)	Alexander III	yes	Norwegians
1314	Eneas	Robert I	yes	English
1319	Eneas	Robert I	yes	English
1336	William (second marriage to a MacLeod of Lewis)	David II	yes	Balliol faction
1346	Malcolm and Farquhar	David II	yes	English
1411	Malcolm	James I	yes?	Duke of Albany
1428	Malcolm	James I	yes	Alexander of the Isles
1430?	Malcolm	James I	yes	Donald Balloch
1452	Malcolm (killed in action)	James II	yes	John of the Isles
1490s?	Duncan (married to Flora MacDonald)	James IV	yes	Gillespie MacDonald
1491	Farquhar	James IV	yes	John of the Isles?

This impressive statement of consistent support for the crown by *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* is only faintly tarnished by the battle of Harlaw in 1411. Farquhar (if it was him who originally compiled this list) neatly circumvented the issue of *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* fighting for Donald, Lord of the Isles, by claiming that their opponent that day was the Regent Robert Stewart, earl of Fife and Menteith. So, according to this version of events, at Harlaw *Clann Mhic an*

⁸ W.F. Skene, *Celtic Scotland: A History of Ancient Alban*, 3 vols (Edinburgh, 1886–90), iii, 356.

Tòisich were really fighting for the crown too. While it is impossible to either prove or disprove this roll of battle honours, it does look suspiciously like an ideal wish-list that a long-term prisoner of the crown might compile as evidence to prove his kindred's consistent historic loyalty to earlier kings of Scots.

Less is known about the authors of the other two manuscripts used by Lachlan Mackintosh to compile the Kinrara MS. That written by Andrew Weaver, identified as Andrew MacPhail, parson of Croy,⁹ begins at exactly the same point as Farquhar's manuscript, so the author may have borrowed a copy of that and then extended it to the death of William Mackintosh in 1550. The precise reasons why George Munro of Davochgartie (in Ross) engaged in writing a history of three *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* chiefs are unknown, although he does seem to have been deeply involved in *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* politics. On 26 February 1546, for example, he agreed to infeft a disaffected member of the Mackintosh kindred, Lachlan Malcomeson, in his lands of Davochgartie.¹⁰ In addition, a previous *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* chief and Farquhar (author of the first manuscript), had both married Fraser of Lovat daughters and, possibly as a result of these marriages, the kindred clearly possessed extensive business dealings in Ross by the sixteenth century.

The Kinrara MS is not the only account that purports to relate the origins of *Clann Mhic an Tòisich*. A second source, known as MS 1467, also contains information relating to the ancestry of the kindred.¹¹ This manuscript, compiled by Dubhghall Albanach c.1467 from earlier material, contains a collection of Gaelic pedigrees which fall into three categories: those relating to the kings of Scots; those relating to the descendants of *Somhairle* (Somerled); and those relating to other kindreds living in Scotland.¹² MS 1467, however, appears to have had a complicated textual history. Essentially, Martin MacGregor has argued that the original compiler used a source which contained MacDonald, MacRuairi, and MacDougall genealogies and which had perhaps been originally composed c.1350. This manuscript (or a copy of it) then came into the possession of a Maclachlan genealogist who updated some of the clan genealogies between 1440 and 1448. Finally, Dubhghall Albanach made his c.1467 copy from the version that included the 'Maclachlan update', again updating material.¹³ Macgregor agrees with John Bannerman that the author of MS 1467

9 M. MacLean, Review of *The Mackintoshes and Clan Chattan*, *SHR*, 2 (1904–05), 201–203.

10 NAS, GD176/56.

11 <http://www.1467manuscript.co.uk/index.html>, accessed 12 January 2011.

12 M. MacGregor, 'Genealogies of the clans: contributions to the study of MS 1467', *Innes Review*, 51:2 (2010), 131–146.

13 *Ibid.*, 145–146.

was in the employ of the MacDonalds and that the manuscript was compiled to demonstrate the pedigrees of chiefs of important clans who recognised the authority of the Lords of the Isles c.1400.¹⁴ While it is unclear at which point during the fifteenth century the *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* pedigree was added to MS 1467, the important fact that it was a fifteenth-century (possibly late) addition is worth noting at this point.

The *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* pedigree in MS 1467 lists six personal names before Gillechattan, and he is followed by a further twenty-three names to William and Donald, the sons of Ferchard. The manuscript also assigns a clear west coast origin to *Clann Mhic an Tòisich*, making them the descendants of Earc, son of Conlaith, son of Fearchar Fada, son of Fearadhach.¹⁵ The penultimate figure in this list was a Cenél Loairn king of the Gaelic kingdom of Dál Riata who died in 697.¹⁶ *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* are not the only kindred linked back to Fearchar Fada, son of Fearadhach, in MS 1467 and it is noticeable that the genealogy of King Lulach mac Gilla Comgáin (1058) goes back to the same two figures. Since King Lulach's kindred came from Moray, and assuming that MS 1467 was an exercise in MacDonald authority, it is surely legitimate to speculate that these genealogies say more about fifteenth-century Macdonald ambitions in Moray than actual common lines of descent from an apical ancestor.

While both the Kinrara MS and MS 1467 place the origins of the Gillechattan antecedents of *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* in west Scotland, and both genealogies contain a figure referred to as Gillechattan, this is the extent of their cooperation. The Kinrara MS calls him *Gillichattan Macgillespic chlerich*; MS 1467 refers to (presumably) the same figure as *Gille Chatáin mac Gille Brátha*. In addition, while the Kinrara MS emphasises the earl of Fife origins of the kindred, only briefly mentioning *Gillichattan Macgillespic chlerich*, MS 1467 instead concentrates on an earlier Dál Riata origin and does not mention any putative Fife additions to the gene pool of *Gille Chatáin's* descendants. Neither manuscript agrees on where to place *Gille Chatáin* in a chronology: MS 1467 places him only four generations after the attested historical figure of Fearchar Fada while the Kinrara MS assigns him a date of 1215 when he allegedly emigrated from Connaught to Lochaber. Such dramatic chronological divergences should be alarming, even taking into account the fact that it is now impossible to

14 Steer and Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture*, 205.

15 Skene, *Celtic Scotland*, iii, 478–479. Not all of the names originally listed by Skene are now legible: <http://www.1467manuscript.co.uk/kindred%2005.html>, accessed 12 January 2011.

16 AU, 697.2; J. Bannerman, *Studies in the History of Dalriada* (Edinburgh, 1974), 109–110.

reconstruct the precise contents of the three earlier manuscripts upon which the Kinrara MS was partly based.

It is also interesting that the *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* genealogy in MS 1467 is directly contradicted by a later MacDonald source, Hugh MacDonald's *History of the MacDonalds*, written after c.1660. Here, it is related that an illegitimate daughter of Angus of the Isles met and mated with 'a son of macDuff, thane of Fife' who had fled to the west to escape a charge of manslaughter. Having impregnated the woman, this man then joined Edward Bruce in Ireland and was killed. The child was subsequently given the patronymic 'Macintosh' to signify that he was a thane's son, raised by Angus of the Isles, and given two estates, one in the Braes of Lochaber and the other in the Braes of Moray.¹⁷ It seems likely that in order to relate this story Hugh MacDonald must have been familiar with one or more of the manuscript sources later used by Lachlan Mackintosh to compile the Kinrara MS, since the *History of the MacDonalds* and the Kinrara MS are the only two extant sources to claim that *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* were descended from a thane of Fife.

Some of the key dates and their accompanying 'facts' in the Kinrara MS are also worthy of further attention. The first of these is the statement that Shaw Mackintosh, second son of Earl Malcolm III of Fife, travelled north in 1163 in the company of King Malcolm IV and a royal army to suppress a rebellion by the men of Moray.¹⁸ This is based upon an obscure and brief entry in the Holyrood Chronicle, *Et rex Malcolmus Mureviensis transtulit*, the exact meaning of which is not clear.¹⁹ This comment was subsequently expanded by Fordun in *Chronica Gentis Scottorum* (and in Bower's later *Scotichronicon*) into a full-blown rebellion by the men of Moray against the crown, and it is presumably one of these later histories that the original author of this part of the Kinrara MS had consulted.²⁰ According to the Kinrara MS, as a reward for his valour in 1163 Shaw was granted the governorship of Inverness Castle, together with the lands of Petty and Brachley, and the forest of Stratherne, by King Malcolm. All these lands and offices lay in eastern Moray and had been confiscated from the families of dead rebels. Between 1236 and 1265 these possessions were allegedly augmented by other lands in Moray: Rothiemurchus, Meikle-Geddes and Rait.²¹

17 *HP*, i, 16–17. This may be a reaction to information in the Kinrara MS where it is explained that a chief died at Petty in Moray but he had previously ordered that his body be taken to an island in Loch Arkaig (Lochaber) for burial [cf: MacFarlane, *Genealogical*, i, 173].

18 MacFarlane, *Genealogical*, i, 159.

19 *Chron Holyrood*, 142.

20 *Chron Bower*, iv, 263–265 and at 489.

21 MacFarlane, *Genealogical*, i, 164.

Clann Mhic an Tòisich claims to these lands will be discussed later in this article but perhaps one of the most important statements in this section of the Kinrara MS is that which describes the marriage of Eva, descendant of *Ghille Chattan Mhor* and heiress of the lands of Glen Lui and Loch Arkaig in Lochaber, to Angus Mackintosh in 1291. According to the manuscript, Eva also carried the hereditary chiefship and command of *Clann Chatain* into the marriage.²² This was the same year that King Edward I of England is said to have stolen all of the important Scottish documents (which conveniently explains why there are no formal records of this marriage and the accompanying property transactions) and for the next few decades, at least according to the Kinrara MS, *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* struggled to survive the wars of independence. It explains that because Angus was loyal to Robert Bruce the [evil] Comyns stole his lands of Meikle-Geddes and Raits, together with the governorship of Inverness Castle. However, all was not lost and c.1336 Angus acquired the lands of Banchor and all of the estates between the Rivers Calander and Guynack in the lordship of Badenoch.²³

Alas, it is unlikely that the marriage between Eva and Angus was consummated. As Cathcart and others have argued, Eva was a mythic and symbolic figure used to legitimise regime change in a number of clan histories and the 'Eva inheritance' is most likely a later fabrication to provide legitimacy for the *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* claim to be chiefs of *Clann Chatain* and lords of Glenlui and Loch Arkaig.²⁴ At this point it is also interesting to note that the Kinrara MS always places important thirteenth- and early-fourteenth-century land grants to *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* during periods of great upheaval. The alleged marriage of Eva and Angus took place in the period of the Great Cause, when King Edward I was stealing Scottish records. The acquisition of Benchar and other Badenoch estates in the mid-1330s took place at a time when Scotland had two crowned and anointed kings (Edward Balliol and David Bruce), civil war between Scots was rife, and from which there are next to no surviving Scottish records.²⁵ The author of the Kinrara MS, or his sources obviously knew their Scottish history, and knew how to provide excuses for a lack of written records that might make their version(s) of *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* history difficult to disprove.

22 Ibid., 166.

23 Ibid., 166–168. The River Gynack runs through Kingussie but the River Calander (also evidently in Badenoch) is currently unlocated.

24 Cathcart, *Kinship and Clientage*, 16–18.

25 Nicholson, *Edward III and the Scots*.

There is an added twist to this search for the origins of *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* because there is a third source which provides different information about the kindred. This is Sir Robert Gordon's, *A Genealogical History of the Earldom of Sutherland*. In this text the origin of *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* is not discussed *per se* but Gordon explicitly states that they had been valued retainers and followers of past earls of Moray, from whom they had got many good lands and possessions in Pettie and Strathearn (eastern Moray).²⁶ Sir Robert never clarifies how long this symbiotic relationship between the earls of Moray and *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* had been in operation. One obvious historical horizon might have been (from) the marriage in 1526 between Lachlan Mackintosh and Jean Gordon, half-sister to the earl of Moray,²⁷ but at this stage the possibility that the link could have been even older cannot be discounted.²⁸

Sir Robert Gordon clearly also must have had access to *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* material (oral or written), or something based upon such a source, when he was writing his genealogical history. In a number of *Clann Mhic an Tòisich*-related incidents Gordon provides specific details that also appear in the later Kinrara MS. For example, both texts describe a *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* retaliatory raid into Strathdee and Glenmuick on 10 November 1592, during which four Gordon lairds were killed.²⁹

This is not the place to properly evaluate the relationship between these two texts, respectively finished by 1630 (Gordon) and 1679 (Kinrara), but it may ultimately be impossible to prove which borrowed from the other because of the three lost earlier manuscripts upon which the Kinrara MS was partially based. What can be said is that there seems to have been a close working relationship between the earls and other members of the Sutherland family and *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* c.250 years before the earliest of the texts was written: Sir Robert Gordon described this as 'strict league of friendship', and the Kinrara MS as 'strenuous and amicable assistance against the earl of Caithness'.³⁰ It is also worth pointing out that there were Sutherland lords in Duffus in the Laich

26 Sir Robert Gordon, *A Genealogical History of the Earldom of Sutherland* (Edinburgh, 1813), 391.

27 This is the assumption made by Cathcart, *Kinship and Clientage*, 167.

28 The Scottish supplications to Rome, for example, record a plea by *Forchardus Lachlawson* and his wife *Christina Stewart* (diocese of Moray) in November 1440. However, although both Ferchar and Lachlan are *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* 'names', there is no sign of a Ferchar Lachlanson in the official *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* histories and genealogies for this time period [cf. *CSSR*, iv, eds A.I. Dunlop and D. MacLauchlan (Glasgow, 1983), nos.719 & 1344.

29 MacFarlane, *Genealogical*, 252; Gordon, *A Genealogical History*, 217.

30 MacFarlane, *Genealogical*, 243; Gordon, *A Genealogical History*, 101.

of Moray from the mid-fourteenth century and that one member of that family was acting as a procurator for the chief of *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* in 1442.³¹

A quick evaluation of the printed Sutherland records shows just how close this relationship must have been during the sixteenth century. In 1549, for example, William Mackintosh of Dunachton was specifically named by Earl John of Sutherland in a bond of mutual friendship and defence between him and the earl of Caithness. Similarly, in 1588, Angus Mackintosh of Dunachton was one of six arbiters chosen by Earl Alexander of Sutherland to act on his behalf.³² On this evidence the links between *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* and the earls of Sutherland clearly spans generations and so it is difficult to say when and by which channel *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* material relating to their 'history' might have travelled northwards to Sutherland where it was subsequently used by Sir Robert Gordon on his visits to Sutherland from his base in Salisbury.³³

This long relationship between *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* and the earls and other members of the Sutherland family, together with the exchange of 'historical' material, is important for another reason. This concerns the issue of two charters at Scone on 28 February 1359 during the reign of King David II (1329–71). The first of these charters was a grant of the barony of Urquhart and its castle by King David to Earl William of Sutherland, in excambion for all of the earl's lands in Kincardineshire that the king had previously granted him in 1345 and 1346.³⁴ The second was a royal confirmation of the rights held by William Mackintosh in the lands of Glenloy and Loch Arkaig in Lochaber. According to the modern edition of the acts of David II these are the only two documents issued at Scone on that date which have survived.³⁵

The second of these documents is important because it is the earliest surviving piece of historic evidence relating to *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* and lands in Lochaber, even though it is a major worry that it only survives as a brief note in the Kinrara MS with no accompanying witness list. In contrast, the former of the two charters issued at Scone in February 1359 appears to sit quite comfortably among a much larger list of Sutherland charters dated to David II's reign. This list consists of eight royal grants of various thanages and other lands in east Scotland to the Sutherland family. The full texts of most of these grants are

31 Fraser, *Sutherland*, i, 513; NAS, GD176/6.

32 Fraser, *Sutherland*, i, 157; iii, 108.

33 D. Allan, "‘Ane Ornament to Yow and Your Famelie’: Sir Robert Gordon of Gordonstoun and the Genealogical History of the Earldom of Sutherland", *SHR*, 80 (2001), 24–44.

34 Fraser, *Sutherland*, iii, nos.12, 14 & 15.

35 *RRS*, vi, nos 208 and 209.

variously found in *The Sutherland Book*, *The Acts of David II*, and they are also discussed in Sir Robert Gordon's genealogical history.³⁶

What is unusual about this list of eight Sutherland-related grants is that the February 1359 Scone confirmation is the only document whose text does not survive in full and it too has no accompanying witness list. It also appears to be the only piece of evidence relating to Urquhart that the editor of the Sutherland papers could find in that archive.³⁷ Even odder is the fact that a mere five months after the king supposedly exchanged the barony and castle of Urquhart for all of the Sutherland lands in Kincardineshire, he issued a charter (of confirmation) on 24 July 1359 in which he confirmed his earlier grants of Kincardineshire lands to the Sutherland family.³⁸ No mention of the exchange of these lands for the barony and castle of Urquhart was made in this latter confirmation.

Though all of this seems peculiar, kings have been known to change their minds and it might be objected that a separate note referring to the February 1359 Sutherland charter appears in the appendices to the printed edition of the Register of the Great Seal. The rolls that contained the originals of the documents listed in these appendices were apparently lost in a shipwreck in 1660 and the only reason why a record of them has survived is because two clerk registrars, James MacGill of Rankeillor and Sir John Hamilton of Magdalens, are thought to have made indexes of the contents of those rolls between 1554 and 1632. Since then, both manuscript indexes have had numerous owners, including George Chalmers and Thomas Thomson, and their editor has described them as being, 'full of obvious and multifarious blunders'.³⁹ But this cannot be the whole story because one of these clerk registers, James MacGill of Rankeillor, must have been known to the Sutherland comital family. He sat in judgement over at least one land dispute between the earls of Sutherland and Caithness and presumably would have had some access to the family papers, as well as having an involvement in the process of lifting the sentence of forfeiture against the earl of Sutherland in 1567.⁴⁰ All of this business seems rather conspiratorial.

Of these two February 1359 Scone charters the Sutherland note seems marginally more secure, though even its appearance in the Great Seal index is

36 *RRS*, vi, nos 96, 208, 307, 320 & 357; Fraser, *Sutherland*, iii, 12–21; Gordon, *A Genealogical History*, 427–428.

37 Fraser, *Sutherland*, i, 45.

38 *Ibid.*, iii, no.18.

39 *RMS*, i, viii–ix.

40 Fraser, *Sutherland*, iii, 108 and 146.

tarnished because there are demonstrable links relating to land disputes between the author of that index and the Sutherland family. While it cannot be conclusively proven that the two Scone charters are fakes there should at least be suspicions about the veracity of the documents, even if we do not yet know the exact relationship between all of the manuscripts in which the notes about these charters appear.

All of these points must also raise doubts about the *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* claim to have been settled in Lochaber as tenants of the Lords of the Isles at an early date. Since Eva is mythical, and if there is also some doubt over the authenticity of the 1359 royal confirmation of land in Lochaber to *Clann Mhic an Tòisich*, and this would not be the first instance of ‘creativity’ in medieval Scottish history,⁴¹ it means there is no good historical evidence to link *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* to Lochaber before the end of the reign of King David II in 1371.

There is, however, yet another distinct layer of material in the Kinrara MS that is perhaps worth quarrying for information. Amongst all of the generally undated claims to various lands between c.1100 and 1500, which have obviously been placed in the Kinrara MS in an attempt to prove a long history of *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* lordship in different areas of the country, there is a much smaller number of precisely dated references concerning land grants to *Clann Mhic an Tòisich*. These pre-1500 grants are laid out in the following table:

Lands	Date of grant claimed in Kinrara MS	Grantor	Proven from other sources
Barony of Rothiemurchus	19/3/1347	Bishop of Moray	No
Barony of Moy	6/2/1437	Bishop of Moray	Nearest dated to 1545 (grant in feu-ferme) ⁴²
Raits and Geddes	5/10/1442	Lord Gordon	Yes
Lands in Lochaber	11/2/1443 (<i>RECTE</i> 1444)	Lord of the Isles	Yes

41 D. Sellar, ‘Highland Family Origins – Pedigree Making and Pedigree Faking’, in L. Maclean (ed.), *The Middle Ages in the Highlands* (Inverness, 1981), 103–116; R.J. Tanner, ‘Cowing the Community? Coercion and Falsification in Robert Bruce’s Parliaments, 1309–1318’, in K.M. Brown and R.J. Tanner (eds), *Parliament and Politics in Scotland, 1235–1560* (Edinburgh, 2004), 50–73.

42 Three sources provide anecdotal information about an event that places *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* as tenants of Moy in the fourteenth century *Chron Frasers*, 85–86; Gordon,

(cont.)

Lands	Date of grant claimed in Kinrara MS	Grantor	Proven from other sources
Stewardry of Lochaber	13/11/1447	Lord of the Isles	Yes
Rothiemurchus (feudal tenure)	24/9/1464	Bishop of Moray	Sasine of same given under royal com- mand in 1475
Forbes covenant	9/8/1467		Yes
Gallovie	2/10/1481	Earl of Huntly	Yes

Checked against other independent sources this list of precisely dated material is surprisingly accurate with two exceptions, the first two grants to *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* from bishops of Moray. But if these first two grants are as accurate as the others in this list they may point to a hitherto unrecognised and relatively early relationship between the bishops of Moray and *Clann Mhic an Tòisich*, that of superior lord and episcopal tenants.

All of this material leaves a rather large knot to unravel in relation to the origins of *Clann Mhic an Tòisich*, and when and why they were granted lands in Lochaber by the Lords of the Isles. In addition, only one of the sources looked at, MS 1467, claims a west coast origin for the kindred, the other three point to an east coast origin. Without recourse to charters and other written records there seems no way of resolving this conundrum.

Clann Dhomhnaill and Clann Mhic an Tòisich: A Marriage Made In Lochaber?

The first unimpeachable historic sources concerning people referred to as Mackintosh places them in eastern Kincardineshire in June 1382, at the opposite side of Scotland from Lochaber. These two royal documents concern a dispute that had arisen between Bishop Adam of Aberdeen and *Farchard Mctoshy* over damage done to ecclesiastic lands in the parish of Birse by Farquhar and his adherents, so (allegedly) bad that the common people there could not stay

A Genealogical History, 46; MacFarlane, *Genealogical*, 37. Respectively, these sources date this event to 1378, 1333, and c.1341. In contrast, the Kinrara MS dates this event to 1454. Such a wildly differing chronology does not inspire confidence in the veracity of the story.

in their houses, till their lands, live in peace, nor enjoy their goods. As a result of these allegations one of King Robert II's sons, Alexander Stewart, was commanded to visit the area and compel Farquhar to give security to ensure that he and his followers behaved themselves in future.⁴³

The most recent commentator upon these events suggested that because Stewart was known to have used *ceathern* (caterans) to aid his policies, and since Farquhar was clearly accused of terrorising some of the inhabitants of Birse, it was likely that Farquhar was a leader of *ceathern*. In addition, because Alexander Stewart was lord of Badenoch and in dispute with the bishops of Moray and Aberdeen at that time, so it was likely that Farquhar and his men were originally from Badenoch and were being used by Alexander to punish the bishop of Aberdeen. This was a tactic used effectively elsewhere in northern Scotland by Alexander at that time.⁴⁴ Such a scenario might lend some weight to the authenticity of the putative 1347 grant of Rothiemurchus to *Clann Mhic an Tòisich*. Unfortunately, however, although Alexander Stewart may have been *de facto* lord of Badenoch and Strathspey from the early 1370s, Rothiemurchus was not part of either of those areas, standing alone as an episcopal lordship. In fact, it was not until almost one year after the 1382 Kincardineshire dispute that Alexander Stewart got control of Rothiemurchus when he leased it from the bishop of Moray on 20 April 1383.⁴⁵ Accordingly, in 1382 *Farchard Mctoshy* would have recognised the bishop of Moray as his superior lord, not Alexander Stewart, assuming of course that Farquhar hailed from Rothiemurchus in the first instance. This is not certain.

Two more pieces of this puzzle remain unsolved. First, these same documents refer to some kind of claim Farquhar possessed in relation to Birse and he was invited to prosecute the bishop at the royal court assured that he would receive justice. This wording would imply that the breakdown in the relationship between the bishop of Aberdeen and Farquhar could have been more concerned with a fracture in the association between an ecclesiastic lord and one of his tenants, rather than Badenoch *ceathern* attacking a political enemy of Alexander Stewart. Compellingly, there is an undated note in the same diocesan records, stating that Farquhar had issued a quitclaim to the bishop regarding the lands of Birse.⁴⁶ Such a document would suggest that Farquhar had in fact surrendered a claim he had to property in Birse and so the earliest record to a person called Mackintosh who had proven rights to lands shows that those lands lay in eastern Scotland. One

43 RPS, 1382/6/2. Date accessed: 6 June 2011.

44 Boardman, *Early Stewart Kings*, 86.

45 *Moray Registrum* no.162.

46 *Aberdeen Registrum*, ii, 152.

added twist is that Birse had once been a thanage, so it is perhaps unsurprising that someone with the surname *Mctoshy* could have held lands there.⁴⁷

The second (and greater) puzzle concerns Farquhar himself. If he is the same person who became the ninth chief of *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* c.1407, and who appears in the Kinrara MS, he must have been an exceedingly odd and complex character. On one hand, in the records of the diocese of Aberdeen, we have a man accused of terrorising an entire neighbourhood. On the other hand, in the Kinrara MS, he is portrayed as 'melancholy', 'indolent', 'reserved', 'given wholly to ease', and as someone who 'voluntarily resigned his heritage and birthright' (the chieftainships of *Clann Chatain* and *Clann Mhic an Tòisich*) in 1409 to his uncle Malcolm. It seems difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile these sources and their different summations of Farquhar's character unless he suffered from some form of bipolar condition.

This leaves two options. First, it may be that Kinrara and his sources genuinely did not know why Farquhar resigned his birthright so they invented reasons to try and account for his unusual behaviour. If this is correct, it means that the earliest identifiable *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* lands lie in eastern Scotland, not in Lochaber. The second, and perhaps more likely, option is this: given the improbability that someone capable of terrorising a district might have voluntarily resigned two chieftainships to a third party because of laziness, it is possible that this section of the *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* genealogy compiled by Lachlan Mackintosh of Kinrara in 1679 (or his sources) is also artificial.

One scenario might be that casting around for earlier references to Mackintoshes, either Kinrara or his sources happened upon the Birse material which conveniently took the 'history' of their kindred back into the fourteenth century. But, because no direct link could be drawn between Farquhar and the later leading kindred of *Clann Mhic an Tòisich*, he was made to voluntarily surrender his entire inheritance, thus creating a(nother) clear fracture line in the genealogy. This would of course require that either Lachlan or one of his sources were familiar with the records of the diocese of Aberdeen but they provide no details about the different unpublished sources they used other than to describe them as 'old manuscripts' and 'other memorials'.⁴⁸ In such a case, any search for the origins of *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* using the Birse evidence appears to lead us into another historic *cul-de-sac*. If this second interpretation is acceptable it means that for Lachlan and his sources, the historical

47 A. Grant, 'Thanes and Thanages, from the Eleventh to the Fourteenth Centuries', in A. Grant and K. Stringer (eds), *Medieval Scotland: Crown, Lordship and Community* (Edinburgh, 1993), 39–81 at 75.

48 MacFarlane, *Genealogical*, 144.

horizon of *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* lay with the figure of Malcolm, alleged to be the 10th chief, who lived in the fifteenth century.

According to the Kinrara MS, in 1411 Malcolm took the side of Donald of the Isles in the dispute over the earldom of Ross and fought for him at Harlaw that same year, commanding the left wing of the army. On account of this loyalty, the Lord of the Isles immediately rewarded Malcolm with either the hereditary right to the lands of Glen Roy and Glen Spean (Kinrara MS), or the hereditary rights to Glen Garry (MacDonald), together with the hereditary stewardship of the lordship of Lochaber.⁴⁹ If he did, no record of these grants has survived.

A near-contemporary chronicle written in the 1440s, Bower's *Scotichronicon*, appears to support these stories. Under the year date 1429 Bower describes a rebellion in Lochaber under the leadership of Alexander, Lord of the Isles, against the crown. The entry relates that when *Clann Chatain* saw the royal standard being unfurled they immediately surrendered to royal authority, abandoning the lord of the Isles.⁵⁰ All of this material might suggest that in 1429 the captain of *Clann Chatain* already recognised the authority of the Lord of the Isles, perhaps even as a superior lord. This, however, does not necessarily equate to *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* holding lands in Lochaber at that time. By 1429 the Lord of the Isles also possessed substantial holdings in eastern Scotland.

As effective earl of Ross from the mid-1420s,⁵¹ Alexander of the Isles gained extensive lands in eastern Scotland including the barony of Kingedward (once belonging to the earls of Buchan), the barony of Kincardine in the Mearns (formed out of the three thanages of Kincardine, Aberluthnott and Fettercairn in 1370 – located just over the watershed from Birse), and the barony of Aberchirder (also a thanage until 1370).⁵² During the same period Alexander was also justiciar north of the Forth and he is also described in one charter as lord of Nairn.⁵³ It was probably as lord of Nairn that Earl Alexander held the lands of the barony of Clunas, Boath, Balmakeith and half of Rait, all of which he granted to the thane of Cawdor, and the barony of Kilravock with the lands of Easter Geddes in the years 1436–40.⁵⁴ Armed with this information about the locations of Alexander's activities and lands in eastern Scotland post-1425, and since Geddes and Raits were located just to the south of the burgh of Nairn amidst the four thanages of Cawdor, Moyness, Brodie, and Dyke, it would have been surprising if he had not

49 MacFarlane, *Genealogical*, 184–185; *HP*, I, 29–30.

50 *Chron Bower*, viii, 263.

51 Brown, *James I*, 58.

52 *RMS*, i, nos. 338 & 339.

53 *ALI*, no.25.

54 *Ibid*, nos.25 & 34.

encountered someone called *Mac an Tòisich* (son of the thane) and who perhaps already led a group of smaller kindreds as captain of *Clann Chatain*. At this stage it is also worth noting that the story in *Scotichronicon* about *Clann Chatain* surrendering to the crown in 1427 was a later addition to one of the *Scotichronicon* manuscripts, MS C (Corpus Christi).⁵⁵ This addition must have been made before 1455 by one of Bower's associates.⁵⁶

The next surviving piece of charter evidence relating to *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* dates to 5 October 1442 when Alexander Seton, lord Gordon, granted 'Malcolm McKynthoschey, Captain of Clanchatane' the lands of Meikle Geddes, together with half of the lands of Rait (with the castle), in the sheriffdom of Nairn, at the opposite side of the country from Lochaber. The grant was made in recognition of Mackintosh's faithful services to Seton and the former was promised equivalent land of the same extent in Seton's own lordship of Strathbogie if the original grant fell through.⁵⁷ This is the first piece of *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* charter evidence where there is no doubt about either the recipient or the document itself and demonstrates that the kindred and the captain of *Clann Chatain* possessed a foothold in eastern Moray, even if it cannot tell us anything about their ultimate origin. Since the lord of Gordon possessed little (if any) Highland land at this time it would be interesting to know exactly where Mackintosh had been performing services for him. The promise of land in Gordon's own lordship might also indicate that he viewed Mackintosh as a trusted adherent.⁵⁸

Just over fourteen months later, on 11 February 1443/44, some thirty-three years after the battle of Harlaw, Alexander of the Isles, earl of Ross, granted forty merks worth of land in the Braes of Lochaber to Malcolm Mackintosh. There is no mention of an earlier charter in this grant. These lands were all located along the north bank of the River Spean between the west end of Loch Laggan and Inverroy, and in Glen Roy itself, amounting to two dabhaichean of land.⁵⁹ This

55 *Chron Bower*, viii, 364.

56 *Ibid*, ix, 211.

57 NAS, GD176/1; 176/7.

58 The Gordons had themselves been 'planted' in north-east Scotland during the fourteenth century. Without any (as far as we know) local ties of kin it must have been difficult for them to establish their lordship beyond Strathbogie. However, their predecessors as lords of Strathbogie had also been lords of Badenoch and Lochaber and it is possible that the Gordon/*Clann Chatain* axis arose out of a combination of the dismemberment of the Randolph earldom of Moray and earlier pre-Randolph ties of service.

59 *ALI*, no.42. The original of this charter has recently been located in Canada. The Kinrara MS claims that Malcom was married to a daughter of MacDonald of Moidart but this marriage must have taken place some time before 1444 [cf: MacFarlane, *Genealogical*, 183].

was clearly a strategic grant by the Lord of the Isles because it effectively meant that his new tenant's lands sat astride and controlled the two main corridors of communication between the lordships of Lochaber and Badenoch, Glen Spean and Glen Roy. It is a pity that nothing is known about the military capacity of *Clann Chatain* at this time because that might have had a bearing upon this grant. In any event, from this point, not only did the identifiable lands belonging to *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* lie at opposite sides of Scotland, but the kindred were also now beholden to two different superior lords. Lord Alexander must have been impressed by Malcolm Mackintosh because on 13 November 1447 he subsequently granted him the office of steward of the entire lordship of Lochaber.⁶⁰ These were substantial grants of property and rights and, because there is nothing in the charter record to suggest that *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* were tenants of the Lords of the Isles before February 1444, their award to Duncan Mackintosh seems surprising. Shortly afterwards, in October 1444, Duncan made his only appearance as a witness to a Lord of the Isles charter.⁶¹

Malcolm soon seems to have managed to upset both of his superior lords. A series of documents produced c.1455 demonstrate that both Alexander of the Isles and Alexander Seton (by now earl of Huntly), had recognised (resumed possession of) the lands and offices they had previously granted to Malcolm, and that Malcolm hoped to appeal to the crown to determine the reasons for his double forfeiture. Interestingly, the timing of Malcolm's appeal could easily coincide with the addition of material to *Scotichronicon* which was intended to demonstrate the previous loyalty of *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* to the crown.

It is also tempting to link these signs of *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* disfavour to the forfeiture of Archibald Douglas, earl of Moray, in 1455 since the forfeiture included (in Moray) the castles of Inverness and Urquhart, a third of the lands of Duffus, the lands of Petty and Brachlie, and lands in Strathdearn.⁶² It is easy to construct a scenario whereby the forfeiture of the earl of Moray would have resulted in competition between the earls of Ross and Huntly for Moray's lands and titles. If *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* had been caught in the middle of such a contest it might have seemed easier to avoid giving service to one of these lords rather than the other, but all they accomplished in reality was to fall out of favour with both.

60 Ibid, no.47. It should also be noted that in a mid-seventeenth century survey of the *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* muniments [NAS, GD44/10/2/8] these were also then the earliest two Lords of the Isles charters to *Clann Mhic an Tòisich*. The original of this charter has recently been discovered in Canada.

61 RMS, ii, no.281.

62 McGladdery, *James II*, 93–94.

If this was the case the disfavour did not last too long. By May 1457 Malcolm was clearly back in favour with Huntly when the latter again granted him the lands of Meikle Geddes and Raits. On this second occasion, however, the lands were not granted in return for rent and services but were instead wadset (mortgaged) to Malcolm who was, it seems, now lending money to Huntly.⁶³ There is nothing in the historical record to indicate whether Malcolm himself was rich or if he had mortgaged other properties to raise the capital to lend to Huntly. One now unanswerable question is whether this wadset of Geddes and Raits to Malcolm was a reward or a punishment.

The Lord of the Isles was not so forgiving. Records show that he had first been approached on behalf of Malcolm around 14 June 1456 with an offer that Torquil Macleod of Lewis and Alexander MacIain of Ardnamurchan should receive the lands of Keppoch and Moy in Lochaber in pledge until a judge would investigate why Malcolm had forfeited those same lands. The request was refused. A late secondary source claims that Malcolm had his Lochaber lands reinstated in July 1456 but there is no record of this in primary sources.⁶⁴

It is not until 1466, after the death of Malcolm, that a member of *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* again appears in the charter record in relation to lands in Lochaber when the Lord of the Isles granted Duncan Mackintosh, Malcolm's son, specific lands in Lochaber, together with the office of baillie of those lands, and the office of baillie of the earl's demesne lands in Lochaber.⁶⁵ This 1466 list of lands differs slightly from those granted to Malcolm Mackintosh in 1444 and it is obvious that the grant of the stewardship of the entire lordship of Lochaber that had originally been given to Malcolm in 1447 had also been substantially curtailed. Clearly, by 1466 the Lords of the Isles had withdrawn some of their patronage from the chiefs of *Clann Mhic an Tòisich*.

But this loss of favour from the Lord of the Isles was accompanied by increasing patronage for *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* from the earls of Huntly. Cathcart has already drawn attention to this realignment of *Clann Mhic an*

63 NAS, GD176/6.

64 *ALI*, nos.62–64. Moy is not specifically named in the original list of lands granted to Malcolm in 1444 so there either must have been a subsequent grant of those lands from the lord of the Isles to Malcolm, February 1444 x June 1456, or (more probably) they were the lands that accompanied the office of steward of the lordship of Lochaber. Moymore (and others) reappear in the crown confirmation of lands in Lochaber to Duncan Mackintosh in 1476 [cf: *RMS*, ii, no.1243] but have disappeared again from another crown confirmation of 1494 [cf: *RMS*, ii, no.2191]. A precept of sasine in 1505 lists all these lands (Keppoch and Moy) in their entirety [cf: NAS, GD176/22].

65 *Ibid.*, no.88.

Tòisich interests.⁶⁶ This patronage from Huntly included the marriage of the MacNiven heiresses of Dunachton and ward of their lands in 1475, the granting of the office of one of Huntly's baillies to Duncan's brother Lachlan before 1478, and a strategic grant of the dabhach of Gallovie in western Badenoch, together with one of the islands in Loch Laggan, again to Lachlan, in 1481. By 1486 Lachlan had also been granted rights in the lands of Banchor and Ratulich, also in Badenoch.⁶⁷

Further rewards were forthcoming. At some point before the 1470s a chief of *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* must have alienated the lands of Rothiemurchus to a cadet branch of the kindred, the Mackintoshes of Rothiemurchus. It has been speculated that this alienation was a reward from the chief of *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* for Shaw Mackintosh leading *Clann Chatain* in battle in 1396 even though such an interpretation cannot be proven.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, this scenario has been used to help explain the 1460 grant by the bishop of Moray to Alexander Keir Mackintosh of the ecclesiastic lands of Rothiemurchus in feu.⁶⁹ Cathcart has further argued that this grant in feu amounted to the alienation of core clan estates and that Duncan, chief of *Clann Mhic an Tòisich*, was not prepared to let this happen. Accordingly, he appealed directly to the crown in an attempt to regain the lordship of these lands. Such a scenario would help explain the 18 July 1475 reference to royal letters that commanded the bishop of Moray to give sasine of Rothiemurchus to Duncan Mackintosh.⁷⁰

Clann Domhnaill and Clann Mhic an Tòisich: Divorce proceedings

On 16 October 1475 the Lord of the Isles was summoned by King James III to appear at parliament to be held on 1 December to answer charges of treason. MacDonald was accused of treasonable negotiations with England, of assisting the forfeited Douglas family, of usurping royal authority, and of besieging Rothesay castle and wasting Bute. Following the non-appearance of the Lord of the Isles a sentence of forfeiture was passed and, on 4 December 1475, the earls of Argyll, Atholl, and Huntly were issued with commissions to pursue

66 Cathcart, *Kinship and Clientage*, 164–165.

67 *Miscellany of the Spalding Club*, ed. J. Stuart (Aberdeen, 1849), iv, 183–184; NAS, GD176/12; Fraser, *Grant*, iii, no.284; NAS, GD44/10/3.

68 Cathcart, *Kinship and Clientage*, 150–151.

69 *Moray Registrum*, no.448.

70 NAS, GD176/10. For the dispute between Alexander and Duncan following the 1475 sasine and its resolution see: Fraser, *Grant*, iii, nos.39 & 283.

the Lord of the Isles to his death and with letters of fire and sword against his lands and possessions. By 28 March 1476 the Earl of Huntly had already taken Dingwall Castle and invaded Lochaber.⁷¹

It can only be imagined under what kinds of difficulties these developments would have placed the chief of *Clann Mhic an Tòisich*. His two immediate superior lords were effectively at war and one of them had invaded the lands that he held of the other. It is a shame there is no record to indicate whether Duncan had been called to provide military service to aid Huntly in invading Lochaber in 1476. If he had been, it might have been a way to preserve and protect his own holdings there against the letters of fire and sword. Whatever the case, by 4 July 1476 Duncan had already resigned his Lochaber holdings into the hands of the king and had received them back to be held directly of the crown.⁷² In this respect, it might also be asked if the chief of *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* had learned from the experience his father had undergone c.1455.

Although the Lord of the Isles received most of his lands back from the crown on 16 December 1478, including the lordship of Lochaber, the crown reserved the earldom of Ross, the lordships of Knapdale and Kintyre, all fortifications within these lands, and the offices of the sheriffdoms of Inverness and Nairn.⁷³ To all those who acknowledged the Lord of the Isles as their superior lord it must have been obvious that this re-grant amounted to a massive diminution of power. It is just a shame that nothing has survived from among the *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* muniments that might specifically indicate how they reacted to this situation in terms of political and personal bonds. Nevertheless, Cathcart has convincingly suggested that their re-alignment with the earls of Huntly after 1476 was a pragmatic choice made as a result of drastic upheavals in the political map of northern Scotland.⁷⁴ Under such circumstances, after the final forfeiture of the lord of the Isles in May/June 1493 the *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* lands in Lochaber were likely protected. Duncan moved swiftly to shield his interests: on 5 January 1494 his charter of 1466 from the Lord of the Isles which granted him specific lands in Lochaber, together with the office of baillie of those lands, and the office of baillie of the earl's demesne lands in Lochaber, was confirmed by King James IV.⁷⁵

71 N. MacDougall, *James III* (Edinburgh, 1982), 121–122.

72 RMS, ii, no.1243.

73 Ibid, no.1410.

74 Cathcart, *Kinship and Clientage*, 166.

75 RMS, ii, no.2191.

Conclusion

There is no conclusive proof in the historical record that *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* had long been tenants of the Lords of the Isles in Lochaber. Eva is clearly a fictional device utilised to retrospectively provide historical depth for *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* lordship in parts of Lochaber, and doubts can also be raised about the fourteenth century material purporting to prove their tenancy of lands in Lochaber too. In fact, the evidence seems to point to an east-coast origin for *Clann Mhic an Tòisich*, perhaps as an episcopal kindred, though it is still difficult to separate out the different layers of fact, propaganda, and downright lies in the Kinrara MS, much of which is coloured by the later Mackintosh – Cameron dispute over lands in Lochaber. One other point worth making is that if Malcolm is the earliest identifiable chief of *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* in the historical record, his appearance on the political stage roughly coincided with the breakup of the Randolph earldom of Moray into competing spheres of Dunbar, Stewart, and episcopal influence.

In fact, it is only in 1444 that incontrovertible proof emerges to confirm a relationship between the chief of *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* and the Lord of the Isles. It is likely that this grant was a direct result of the acquisition of the earldom of Ross, together with further landed interests in eastern Scotland, by the lord of the Isles; and it was probably there that a direct link was first forged between the Lord of the Isles and the chief of *Clann Mhic an Tòisich*. If this interpretation is correct it means that the superior lord-tenant relationship between the Lords of the Isles and *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* was not a canonical marriage but only a brief flirtation which lasted for a mere thirty-one years before the former's first forfeiture in 1475. Thereafter the chief of *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* moved swiftly to realign his interests with the Earl of Huntly and the crown. This secured crown confirmation of *Clann Mhic an Tòisich* interests in Lochaber that would survive the final forfeiture of the Lord of the Isles in 1493 and ensure that their interests in the west would be protected in the longer term by Huntly. By any definition this was a remarkable example of deft political manoeuvring with no loss of land and/or prestige for *Clann Mhic an Tòisich*. It may also have paved the way for Huntly's eventual acquisition of the lordship of Lochaber.

Bishops, Priests, Monks and Their Patrons

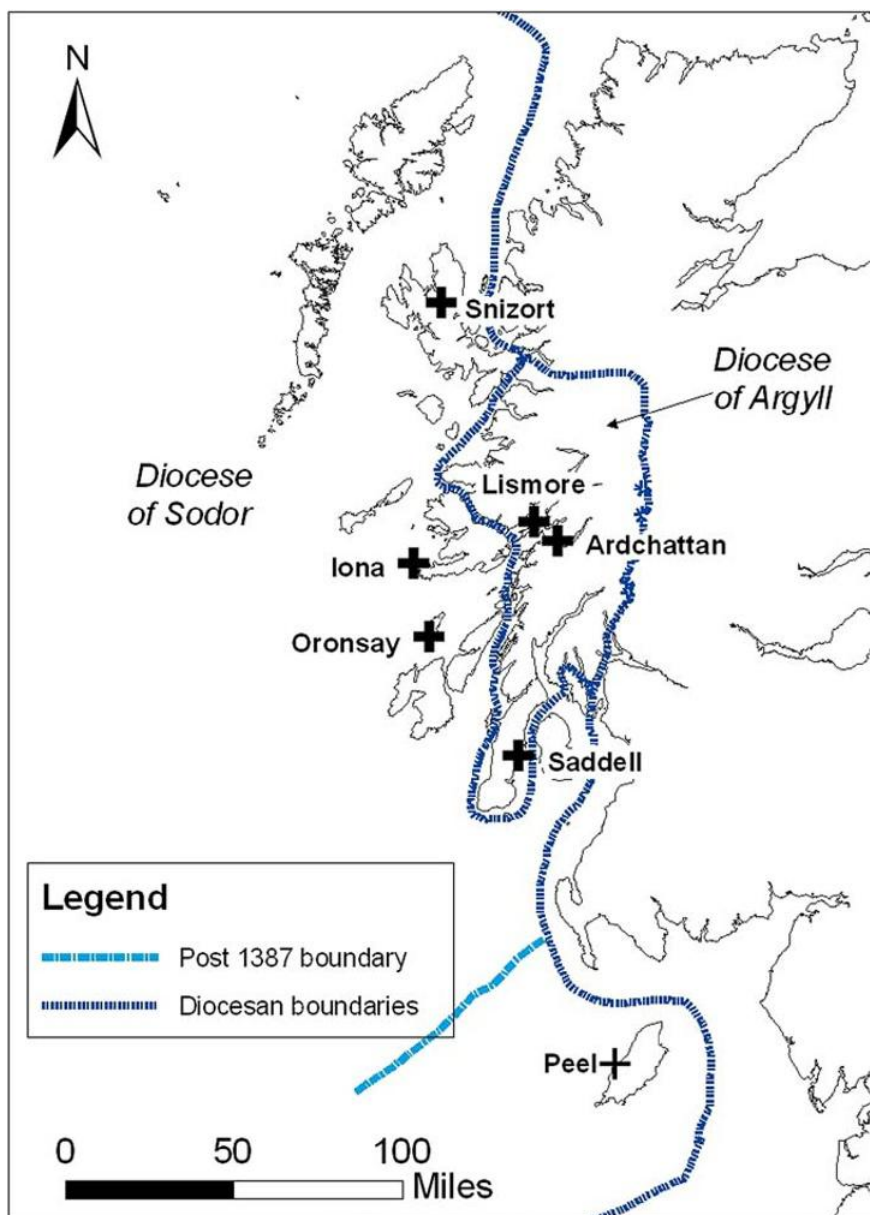
The Lords of the Isles and the Church

Sarah Thomas

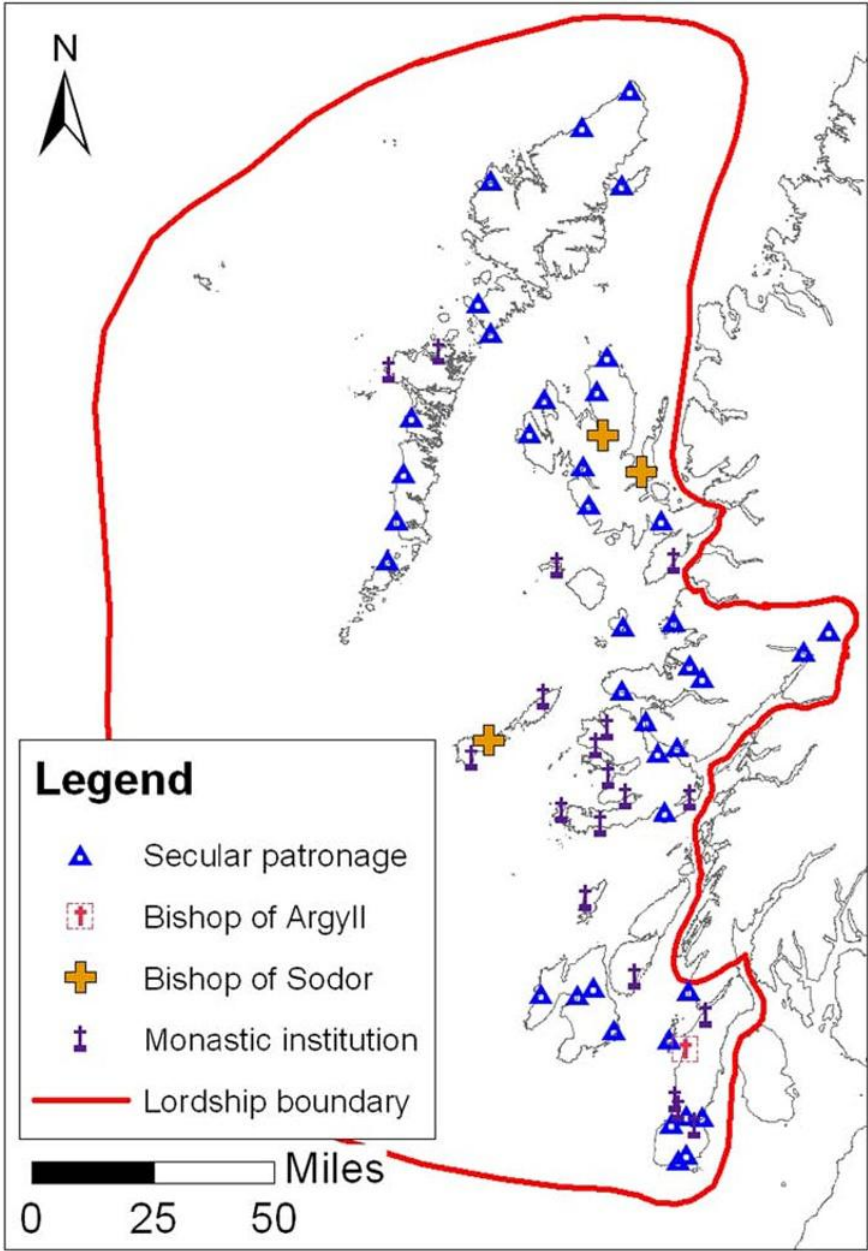
Whilst the MacDonald contribution to the Church, and in particular to Iona, has been discussed, their involvement in the patronage of parish churches and secular clergy has up until now been neglected.¹ This is an area of immense potential, given the surviving source material in the papal archives; through the study of clerical identities, building on the work of John Bannerman, we are able to identify connections between the clergy and the Lords of the Isles.² The Lordship of the Isles incorporated two bishoprics, four monastic houses and approximately 64 parish churches of which the Lords had patronage of 41.³ In an age where the appropriation of parish churches to monastic and ecclesiastical authorities was widespread, the Lordship's patronage of so many parish churches meant that they had considerable influence over clerical careers and had significant scope to reward kindreds. However, that amount of control over ecclesiastical benefices might strain relations between lord and bishop. Relations with the monastic institutions were not always smooth either; a particular issue was the admission of MacKinnons into the monastery of Iona.

The Lordship lands lay within two dioceses; their lands in the Hebrides in the diocese of Sodor and their lands in Kintyre, Knapdale, Lochaber, Moidart,

- 1 Steer and Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture*; Bannerman, 'Lordship of the Isles'; M. MacGregor, 'Church and Culture in the late medieval Highlands' in J. Kirk (ed), *The Church in the Highlands* (Edinburgh, 1998); R.D. Oram, 'The Lordship of the Isles: 1336–1545', in D. Omand (ed), *The Argyll Book* (Edinburgh, 2006) 123–139.
- 2 Steer and Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture*; Bannerman, 'Lordship of the Isles'; Bannerman, *The Beatons*.
- 3 A.I. Dunlop, 'Notes on the Church in the Dioceses of Sodor and Argyll', *RSCHS* 16 (1968) 179–184; I.B. Cowan, 'The Medieval Church in Argyll and the Isles', *RSCHS* 20 (1978–80) 15–29; A.D.M. Barrell, 'The church in the West Highlands in the late middle ages', *IR* 54 (2003) 23–46. The most recent contributions to this area are Iain MacDonald's PhD thesis on the secular church in Argyll, I.G. MacDonald, *The Secular Church and Clergy in the Diocese of Argyll from circa 1189 to 1560* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 2008) now published as I.G. MacDonald, *Clerics and Clansmen: The Diocese of Argyll between the Twelfth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Leiden, 2013), and the author's thesis on the church in the Hebrides, S.E. Thomas, "From Rome to the ends of the habitable world": the provision of clergy and church buildings in the Hebrides, circa 1266 to circa 1472; unpublished PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 2009.



MAP 5.1 *Dioceses of Sodor and Argyll showing diocesan centres and chief monastic houses.*
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 SUPPLIED SERVICE.



MAP 5.2 *Patronage and appropriation of parish churches in the Lordship of the Isles.*
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SUPPLIED SERVICE.

Morvern and Ardnamurchan in the diocese of Argyll.⁴ This meant that the lords had two bishops to contend with. The fourteenth-century relationships between the first Lord of the Isles and his episcopal counterparts are murky to say the least. It has been argued that the bishops of Sodor from 1331 to 1374, Thomas de Rossy and William Russell, were royal agents who were chosen by the diocese's patron, the king of Scots, in order to counteract MacDonald power.⁵ It is certainly true that neither was native to the Hebrides; De Rossy was from Angus and Russell previously abbot of Rushen on Man.⁶ De Rossy had been provided by the pope whilst in Avignon and Russell was elected bishop by the clergy of Man and then provided by the pope.⁷ Both may have had the tacit support of the Scottish crown, but neither had explicit links and both were provided during periods of relative crown weakness.⁸

The charters of the lords of the Isles shed some information about relations between lay and ecclesiastical lords. The first bishop after the split of the Sodor diocese in 1387, Michael, appears as a witness to a charter of Donald, lord of the Isles, given at Ardtornish in November 1409.⁹ The first bishop of Sodor to be closely related to the Lord of the Isles, Angus de Insulis, was a witness to a charter granted at Finlaggan in June 1427.¹⁰ This, however, is the only occasion Angus or any of the later bishops appear as witnesses to Lordship charters. Two factors may explain this situation: firstly, the incidence of survival and secondly the shift in the centre of power from the west to the earldom of Ross. For example, only two charters exist for Alexander's initial rule from 1423 to 1432 and subsequently from 1432 to 1449 all 23 charters were granted at sites in the eastern half of the earldom of Ross.¹¹ From 1449 to the forfeiture of Ross in 1475, only 15 charters were granted within the Lordship, whilst the majority, 34, were granted in the earldom of Ross.¹² Whilst leading secular figures from the Lordship, such as MacLeod of Dunvegan and MacLean of Duart, were clearly in the retinue of the Lord of the Isles in the earldom of Ross, as their presence

4 Bannerman, 'Lordship of the Isles', 211.

5 Oram, 'Lordship of the Isles', 127.

6 *GUS*, *Collectorie* 282 fol.193r; *Cronica Regum Mannie et Insularum: the Chronicle of the Kings of Man and the Isles*, trans. G. Broderick (Douglas, 1996) fol.51v [hereafter *CM(B)*].

7 *Jean XXII: lettres communes*, ed. G. Mollat, 16 vols (Paris, 1928) 10, 230; *CM(B)* fol.51v.

8 Thomas de Rossy was provided to the bishopric during the minority of David II and William Russell was provided during David's captivity in England.

9 *ALI*, 27–28.

10 *Ibid.*, 34–35.

11 *Ibid.*, 34–36, 37–74.

12 *Ibid.*, 75–172.

as charter witnesses indicates, the bishop does not appear to have been present.¹³

The afore-mentioned Angus was the bishop most closely related to the Lords of the Isles; he was an illegitimate son of Donald, Lord of the Isles and a half-brother of Alexander, Donald's son and successor.¹⁴ The promotion of Angus to the episcopal seat may be indicative of MacDonald influence possibly with an electoral body which may have comprised the chapter of Sodor, based at Snizort in Skye, and the clergy of the diocese. As the bishop-elect of Sodor, he was provided to the see by Pope Martin V on 13 July 1426.¹⁵ His consecration was delayed, probably as a result of a law-suit, until Angus went to Rome in person in early 1428.¹⁶ As bishop-elect he was a witness to a charter at Finlaggan in June 1427, although in this document there is no acknowledgement of the fact that he was yet to be consecrated since he was simply called 'episcopus Sodorensi'.¹⁷

Angus's attainment of the bishopric reflects MacDonald confidence in their power and status, particularly given that his candidature for bishop was probably not supported by the see's patron, James I.¹⁸ Whilst the MacDonalds had good relations with James I initially after his return from captivity in England in the spring of 1424, by 1426 tensions between James I and the MacDonalds were growing.¹⁹ Alexander's involvement in feuding in the north-west Highlands combined with Alexander's uncle, John Mor, harbouring James's one surviving Albany Stewart relative, James the Fat, in Ulster meant that James would have been very unlikely to elevate a MacDonald to the bishopric of Sodor.²⁰ Following Alexander's surrender in 1429, Angus seems to have been summoned to the March Parliament in 1430 in order to submit to the king.²¹ The recognition by the abbot of Iona of the ordinary authority of the

13 For example, both Lachlan MacLean of Duart and John MacLeod of Dunvegan were witnesses to charters given in Inverness and Kinmylies in 1439 and 1440 (*ALI*, 45–53). The abbot of Iona only appears on one occasion as a witness to a Lordship charter whilst the abbot of Fearn witnessed two charters, one in 1444 and the other in 1463 (*ALI*, 196, 67 & 126).

14 *ALI*, 300.

15 *CPL*, vii, 478.

16 *The Apostolic Camera and Scottish Benefices, 1418–88*, ed A I Cameron (Oxford, 1934) 8–9.

17 *ALI*, 35.

18 Oram, 'Lordship of the Isles', 133.

19 Brown, *James I*, 59, 93.

20 Brown, *James I*, 93; Oram, 'Lordship of the Isles', 133.

21 *RPS* 1430/54. Date accessed: 13 July 2009.



ILLUS. 5.1 *Skeabost Island, Skye, from the south-east: the church of Snizort on the island was the location of the see of Sodor for a period in the later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries following the loss of Peel on the Isle of Man during the Great Schism.*

PHOTO: SARAH THOMAS

bishop of Dunkeld in 1431 has been interpreted as part of a campaign by James I to control the Lord of the Isles.²²

If Angus is an example of apparently cordial relations between bishop and lord, then Bean MacGillandris, bishop of Argyll, is a prime example of a much more complicated relationship between lord and bishop. It would be overly simplistic to describe the relationship merely as one marked by discord, since Bean MacGillandris was a cleric who gained benefices through the patronage of the Lord of the Isles. MacGillandris served as chaplain and secretary to Donald, Lord of the Isles, in the 1380s and when Donald petitioned on his behalf for the deanery of Lismore he called him his 'faithful servant'.²³ MacGillandris also held the rectory of Kilmonivaig in Lochaber which was under the patronage of the Lords of the Isles.²⁴

22 *Chron Bower*, viii 266; Barrell, 'Church in the West Highlands', 26; Oram, 'Lordship of the Isles', 133; Brown, *James I*, 103.

23 *ALI*, 239.

24 *Ibid*, 239.

It was his retention of Kilmonivaig which caused the dispute between MacGillandris, the papacy and the Lord of the Isles. The dispute arose after MacGillandris's collation to the deanery of Argyll and the presentation by Alexander, lord of Lochaber, of *Cristine Neachtain Macalpen* to the rectory of Kilmonivaig in October 1395.²⁵ MacGillandris was said to have retained the rectory unlawfully and the bishop of Argyll also refused to admit *Cristine* to the church.²⁶ Mediation by the bishop of Sodor failed to produce a result since in July 1405, Donald, Lord of the Isles, presented *Cristinus Dominici called Macdonnailylech* to the rectory, but MacGillandris, by now bishop of Argyll, 'refused to institute him, wishing himself to retain the said church, which he had held for more than seven years'.²⁷ MacGillandris was tenacious since in June 1411, a papal letter addressed him as bishop of Argyll also stated that he still held the church on the grounds that 'one tenth of his mensal resources were unlawfully held by powerful noblemen of the district'.²⁸

This dispute between the bishop of Argyll and the Lords of the Isles concerned the control of patronage and ecclesiastical poverty; in retaining the rectory, claiming poverty, MacGillandris effectively challenged the authority of the patron. Disputes between bishop and patron seemed to have continued sporadically in the fifteenth century in the diocese of Argyll, involving the issues of clerical poverty, language and crown influence.²⁹ Thus, in the 1430s, the Lord of the Isles found his presentation of clerics to the churches of Kilmichael and Kilcolmkill in Kintyre ignored in favour of clerics presented by the bishop of Argyll, George Lauder.³⁰ Yet not all candidates presented by the lay patron found their nomination blocked; for example, in 1467 Duncan Ó Brocháin was presented to Bishop Lauder and confirmed by him in possession of a prebendary of Kilcolmkill in Kintyre.³¹ Lauder seems to have acted as a royal agent for James I and consequently after his death he was prepared to confirm Lordship candidates.³²

25 *CPL Benedict XIII*, 55–56.

26 *CPL Benedict XIII*, 56.

27 *CPL Benedict XIII*, 56–57, 141.

28 *CPL Benedict XIII*, 241; the case is also discussed by MacDonald, *Clerics and Clansmen*, 86–87.

29 For a discussion of the issue of episcopal and lay patronage in the diocese of Argyll, see MacDonald, *Clerics and Clansmen*, 86–93.

30 MacDonald, *Clerics and Clansmen*, 88–89.

31 MacDonald, *Clerics and Clansmen*, 94.

32 MacDonald argues that Lauder was also seeking to ensure that the clergy were loyal not to the local nobility, but to the bishop. We should probably see the episcopal

There is no evidence of such challenges in the neighbouring diocese, probably because the bishops from Angus onwards were fairly independent of the Scottish crown. The closest parallels are disputed appropriations; for instance, the grant of the church of Kirkapoll on Tiree to the bishop of Sodor in 1397 stated that the church had been 'unlawfully detained by the prior of Ardchattan'.³³ Kirkapoll had been held by Ardchattan for over a hundred years as of 1380, probably through the patronage of the MacDougalls.³⁴ Bishop Angus's attempt in 1428 to appropriate the rectory of Kilchoman on Islay to the bishopric failed, probably because the patron, his uncle, Alexander, Lord of the Isles, refused consent for the appropriation.³⁵ Angus's petition made no mention of the incumbent, *Neil Celestini*, who had been a witness to a Lordship charter a year earlier. This link between Neil and Alexander may suggest that the patron supported him against the bishop.³⁶ An important difference between this case and MacGillandris is possession; at the time of Angus's petition he did not have possession of the benefice, whereas MacGillandris did and his case demonstrates how hard it was to remove a determined incumbent.

There seems to have been a degree of separation between the bishops and the Lords of the Isles. This apparent cleavage may be an illusion generated by the absence of evidence, but the locations of the episcopal seats in comparison with the centre of the Lordship sharpens this impression. The bishops of Argyll and Sodor's seats were on the islands of Lismore and Skye respectively; Lismore was outwith the Lordship whilst Skye was outside the heartland of the MacDonalds. Bishop Angus sought in 1433 to move his cathedral from Snizort to 'some honest place within the diocese'.³⁷ This attempt to shift the episcopal seat may represent MacDonald discomfiture with the location of Snizort.³⁸

confirmations of the 1430s as a combination of royal pressure, after James's expedition to Knapdale, and the bishop seeking to assert his authority (MacDonald, *Clerics and Clansmen*, 87–89). Boardman also argues that the bishop's appropriation of the patronage of benefices in Glenorchy and Lochgoilhead was a result of James's activities in the west (Boardman, *The Campbells*, 126).

33 *CPL Benedict XIII*, 79.

34 *ALI*, 6–7.

35 *CSSR*, ii, 197–198.

36 *ALI*, 35.

37 *CSSR*, iv, 25.

38 Bannerman noted that Snizort had not been 'a happy choice' as cathedral seat, but offered no explanation for this unhappiness (Steer and Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture*, 208 n.9). MacGregor suggests that the bishop's see and the cathedral seat lacked the patronage of the Lords of the Isles enjoyed by the monastic institutions within the Lordship (MacGregor, 'Church and Culture', 20).

Despite increasing MacDonald landholdings in Skye during the fifteenth century, it was still outwith what might be considered their territorial heartland. The northernmost island location for a Lordship charter is Aros on Mull.³⁹

The Lordship was unusual in Scotland for the number of benefices in lay patronage within its territory. Within the Lordship, there were about 62 parish churches in the late Middle Ages; 43 in the diocese of Sodor and 19 in Argyll. Of the 43, 16 were appropriated to monastic institutions, two to the bishop whilst the remainder were under secular patronage.⁴⁰ In the Argyll diocese areas of the Lordship, only four parish churches were appropriated to monastic institutions, one to the bishop of Argyll while the remainder were under lay patronage.⁴¹ There were therefore probably 39 parish churches in the patronage of the Lords of the Isles. Whilst the diocese of Aberdeen had an appropriation rate of 95% and the national average in Scotland was 86.5%, in the Lordship the rate was only 36%.⁴² This means that the Lords of the Isles potentially could wield considerable influence and power through the presentation of clergy to benefices. However, we do have to question whether all the churches were in the direct patronage of the lords or whether patronage might, in some cases, be devolved to local lords.

Papal petitions occasionally recorded the type of patronage, but rarely the identity of the lay patron. Exceptions include petitions regarding the parish churches on Islay which explicitly stated that John, Lord of the Isles, was the patron.⁴³ One charter where patronage of the churches was granted was that of John I which granted the lands of Garmoran to the MacRuairis between 1346 x 1372/3.⁴⁴ The majority of Lordship charters, however, do not specifically grant patronage of the churches – for example, the grant of Barra to the MacNeills of June 1427 – which probably means that the Lords of the Isles retained patronage.⁴⁵

Patronage of the rectory of Kilmonivaig, discussed above, is an interesting case because the presentation of rectors seems to fluctuate between the Lord of the Isles and the local lord of Lochaber. In 1395, the presentation was made by Alexander, lord of Lochaber, whereas in 1405, a candidate was presented by

39 *ALI*, 153.

40 Thomas, *Clergy and Church Buildings in the Hebrides*, 75–78.

41 MacDonald, *Clerics and Clansmen*, Appendix A 301–320 & 340–357.

42 I.B. Cowan, 'The Church in the Diocese of Aberdeen', *Northern Scotland*, 1 (1972) 19–48, at 43–44; Cowan, 'Medieval Church in Argyll and the Isles', 26–27.

43 See for example, *CPL*, iv, 224.

44 *ALI*, 10.

45 *ALI*, 34–35.

Donald, Lord of the Isles.⁴⁶ Alexander may have been dead by July 1405 since his widow was dispensed to remarry in September 1406.⁴⁷ Alexander's son was probably a minor in 1405 and so it may have been natural for patronage to revert to the Lord of the Isles.⁴⁸ Where local lords were not closely related to the MacDonalds, the Lord of the Isles seems to have retained patronage. In certain cases, the local lord may have acted as the *de facto* patron or at least been able to propose candidates to the Lord of the Isles. For instance, on two occasions in the fifteenth century, the parish church of St Comgan's of Duirinish in Skye was held jointly with that of Glenelg; both are located in lands held by the MacLeods of Harris.⁴⁹ Whilst this may suggest MacLeod influence, the appearance of a MacMharcuis cleric at Kilmaluag of Trotternish in Skye in the 1420s is probably indicative of Lordship patronage potentially against the wishes of the MacLeods of Harris, the local lords.⁵⁰ Elsewhere in the Lordship, for instance in Morvern and Ardnamurchan, the appearance of clergy from kindreds based in the south, such as MacKays and MacEacherns, probably also shows Lordship patronage at work.⁵¹ The retention of patronage by the Lords of the Isles is in contrast to the situation in Argyll where some local lords such as the Scrymgeours of Glassary and the Campbells of Ardscofnish held and struggled to retain patronage of the parish churches within their lands.⁵²

We must acknowledge that two factors might have curtailed the rights of the patron to present: firstly, disputes over episcopal presentations, as discussed above, and secondly papal provisions. The growing power and centralisation of the papacy and the use of papal provisions to acquire benefices placed further restrictions on the rights of lay patrons.⁵³ However, where a benefice was in lay patronage, the pope would usually require the provisors to ensure the candidate had the patron's consent before granting the benefice.⁵⁴

46 *CPL Benedict XIII*, 55–56, 141.

47 *CPL Benedict XIII*, 155.

48 *ALI*, xxxi.

49 *CSSR*, iv, 58; Cameron (ed), *Apostolic Camera*, 139.

50 *CPL*, viii 14, (see discussion on page 13).

51 MacDonald, *Clerics and Clansmen*, 146.

52 Boardman, *The Campbells*, 125, 129; MacDonald, *Clerics and Clansmen*, 146.

53 Barrell, 'Church in the West Highlands', 37.

54 Barrell, 'Church in the West Highlands', 38. For example, in 1447, Richard Cady was granted provision to the canonry and prebend of Tarbolton in the church of Glasgow and of lay patronage 'provided that the consent of the patrons be obtained' (*CSSR*, v, 7) and in 1469, Nigel son of Colin was to be provided to the rectory of Kilkivan in the diocese of Argyll 'provided the consent of the lay patron is given' (*CSSR*, v 424).

After the forfeiture of the Lordship in 1493, churches under their patronage passed to the crown and consequently during the sixteenth century, crown grants of the benefices of these churches were recorded in the Registers of the Privy Seal; 14 Sodor parish churches and 11 Argyll churches appear in these registers.⁵⁵ Crown grants of these parish churches strongly suggest that the Lord of the Isles held the rights of patronage prior to the forfeiture. It is probable that local lords such as the MacLeods were involved in the selection of clerics, but the final decision lay with the Lords of the Isles.

It is possible primarily through papal sources to identify 195 and 101 fourteenth and fifteenth century clergy associated with churches in the Lordship within the dioceses of Sodor and Argyll respectively.⁵⁶ The 101 Argyll clergy include approximately 20 who also held or sought to hold benefices in the diocese of Sodor; this indicates that the ecclesiastical boundary between the dioceses was rather more fluid than might otherwise have been the case because of the different secular boundaries. This paper will henceforth concentrate on the clergy of the diocese of Sodor, but with some reference to those of Argyll.

A hurdle to identification is inconsistent naming patterns; clergy could be recorded by first name and patronymic, first name only or first name and surname. A cleric might be named *Donald Dominici* in one petition and then in another be called *Donald Duncani Macanfirlegind*.⁵⁷ This can aid identification, but it can also cause doubt as to whether it is the same man. A related problem is the way that Gaelic forenames were rendered into Latin; for instance, the Latin names *Colinus* or *Malcolmus* might replace the Gaelic names *Gille-Coluim*, *Mael-Coluim* or *Cailean*. There are therefore instances where we almost certainly have the same cleric named on several occasions but using different forenames each time; thus in the 1420s and 1430s a cleric named *Molcolmus McGillebride*, *Colin Bricii* and *Columba Macgillabridi* held

55 Sodor churches – *RSS*, i, 68 (Kilarrow, Islay), i, 163 (Kilchrist, Skye), i, 261 (Kilchoman, Islay), i, 331 (Kilchattan, Gigha), i, 352 (Eynort, Skye), i, 365 (Uig, Skye), ii, 272 (Benbecula), ii, 301 (Barvas on Lewis, Kilmaluag of Skye and Kilconan of Skye), ii, 739 (Benweall in Uist), ii, 753 (Harris), iii, 413 (Kildalton, Islay) and v, 138 (Ey, Lewis). Argyll churches – *RSS*, i, 191 (Arisaig), i, 201 (Kilchousland), i, 321 (Knoydart), i, 331 (Kilcolmkill in Morvern), i, 409 (Kilmonivaig and Eilean Fhionain), i, 555 (Kilblane), ii, 456 (Kilkivan), ii, 711 (Killintag) and iv, 66 (Kilmallie).

56 Thomas, *Provision of Clergy and Church Buildings* (for Sodor clergy) and MacDonald, *Clerics and Clansmen* (for Argyll clergy).

57 *CSSR*, iv, 228, 231. These two petitions are only two weeks' apart and were made by the same cleric seeking the perpetual vicarage of Kilchoman.

the rectory of Kilchrist of Strath on Skye.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, it has been possible to identify the social origins of approximately 25% of the Sodor clergy and through that ascertain links with the Lords of the Isles.

The ruling kindred's ability to fill ecclesiastical benefices with members of their own family is demonstrated by Bishop Angus. There are a further five clerics who may have belonged to the ruling kindred; one was an illegitimate son of Bishop Angus.⁵⁹ Another was probably an illegitimate brother of Donald Balloch; this cleric, *Angus Johannis de Insulis*, described himself as of royal race and the illegitimate son of a married man and an unmarried woman.⁶⁰ In 1456, he claimed to be rector of Kilchoman on Islay and Kilcolmkill in Morvern and later that year to have become a canon in the church of Ross.⁶¹ The first two benefices were under the patronage of the lords and the third lay within the earldom of the Ross.⁶² The third cleric was a Bartholomew de Insulis; the designation *de Insulis* was commonly used by the Lord of the Isles and his immediate family.⁶³ However, the name Bartholomew, in Gaelic *Parthalán* or *Parlan*, was not typically used by the MacDonalds.⁶⁴ It may be that Bartholomew was the illegitimate offspring of a MacDonald, possibly related to the MacFarlanes whose surname contains the element *Parlan*. Whilst the designation used by these three was *de Insulis*, two clerics, Gilbert and Patrick, used the title *de Yle*. This designation was used primarily by the Lord of the Isles, occasionally by his children or in order to indicate a geographical origin on Islay. Bannerman doubted whether either of these men was related to the Lords of the Isles because neither name was commonly used by the MacDonalds; he suggests that both men may have originated from Islay.⁶⁵

58 *Molcolmus McGillebride* (CSSR, ii, 203); *Colin Bricii* (CPL, vii, 461); *Columba Macgillabridi* (CSSR, iii, 26).

59 Angus *Angusii de Insulis* who was a priest in 1465 and who sought the abbacy of Iona (CSSR, v, 303).

60 CSSR, v, 166; Angus's patronymic, *Johannis de Insulis*, matches that of Donald Balloch in a supplication of 1433 in which he was called *Donald Johannis de Insulis*. This patronymic plus the claim to be of royal race or of a noble race of earls strongly suggests that Angus belonged to the immediate family of John, Lord of the Isles, and Iain Mor, brother of Donald, Lord of the Isles, is strong candidate for his father. I have to thank Dr Iain MacDonald for suggesting this relationship.

61 CSSR, v, 166, 167.

62 Whilst John, lord of the Isles, may not have had any direct influence, the family's links to the Church of Ross were strong given his father's burial at Fortrose (*HP*, i, 47).

63 Steer and Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture*, 126.

64 *Ibid*, 155.

65 *Ibid*, 125 n.9.

Whilst relatively few members of the immediate family of the Lords of the Isles can be identified as clergy, the territorial kindreds supplied a high proportion of clergy in the dioceses of Sodor and Argyll. The territorial kindreds were those kin-groups who held lands on certain islands or areas of the mainland.⁶⁶ The sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century accounts of Donald Monro and Hugh MacDonald of Sleat related that the Council of the Isles had four grades within the territorial kindreds. First came the MacDonalds, then the four great nobles – of Duart, MacLean of Lochbuie, MacLeod of Dunvegan and Harris and MacLeod of Lewis, beneath them were the four thanes – MacKinnon, MacQuarrie, MacNeill of Gigha and MacNeill of Barra, and finally those who held their lands in freehold, MacKay of the Rhinns, MacNicol in Portree, MacEachern of Killellan in Kintyre, MacKay of Ugadale, MacGillevray in Mull and MacMillan of Knapdale.⁶⁷

The rectory of the parish church of Kilchoman on Islay was dominated by clergy belonging to the territorial kindreds. Amongst those who held or indeed who sought to hold it were a MacLean of Kingairloch – a branch of the MacLeans of Lochbuie – a MacLeod of Harris, a MacKay of the Rhinns of Islay and a MacEachern of South Kintyre.⁶⁸ The first, Alexander *Tarleti Ferchardi* MacLean, probably owed his possession of the rectory to his likely father, *Tarletus Ferchardi's* close relationship with Alexander, Lord of the Isles, for whom he witnessed a charter in 1427 and with whom, according to MacLean tradition, he was imprisoned in 1429.⁶⁹ Whilst Alexander MacLean may be commemorated on a grave-slab from Lochaline, there is no doubt that Andrew MacEachern, rector of Kilchoman in the 1380s and 1390s is the cleric remembered, along with his father, on a free-standing cross from Kilkivan in South Kintyre.⁷⁰ The MacEacherns were a kindred based in south Kintyre who held lands from the Lords of the Isles and it is in this context that we should see Andrew's possession of Kilchoman.⁷¹ The MacKays of the Rhinns also had

66 Bannerman, 'Lordship of the Isles', 217.

67 D. Monro, 'A Description of the Occidental, ie the Western Islands of Scotland c 1549', in *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland*, ed. R.W. Monro (Edinburgh 1999) 310; *HP*, i 24; The division of kindreds into four grades is similar to that laid out in seventh and eighth century Irish law tracts which was based partly on property qualifications and the number of rent-paying clients (Bannerman, 'Lordship of the Isles', 222).

68 Alexander MacLean (CSSR, iv, 193, v 91), William MacLeod (Reg. Aven. 196 fol.60–61), Aed MacKay (*CPL Clement VII*, 79, 189 and Andrew MacEachern (*ibid*, 79, 189).

69 *ALI*, 35; A. MacLean Sinclair, *The Clan Gillean* (Charlottetown, 1899), 277.

70 Steer and Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture*, 129, 159.

71 *Ibid*, 159; *ALI*, 231.



ILLUS. 5.2 *Cross-slab from Cill Choluim Chille, Lochaline, commemorating Lachlan MacEachan, Hector, Alan and Alexander, sons of Terletus of Carna.*

COURTESY OF SCRAN



ILLUS. 5.3 *Cross, Campbeltown: originally erected in the churchyard at Kilkivan in Kintyre, its inscription commemorates Ivar MacEachern, rector of Kilkivan, and his son, Andrew, rector of Kilchoman, who commissioned the cross.*

close connections to the Lords of the Isles; their chieftain is supposed to have sat on the Council of the Isles.⁷² The one MacKay cleric recorded as having held the rectory of Kilchoman was Aed MacKay who struggled to oust Andrew MacEachern, probably succeeding in the 1390s.⁷³ It is the clergy associated with Kilchoman who have the clearest links to the Lords of the Isles. Kilchoman was undoubtedly the most desirable benefice in the Hebrides since it had one of the highest incomes of all the Hebridean parish churches.⁷⁴ It was also in the heartland of the Lords of the Isles and unquestionably in their patronage; presentation to this church almost certainly represented a reward to certain kindreds.

Nevertheless, Kilchoman was not the only church attained by members of the territorial kindreds. Bishop John, son of Hector MacLean seems to have begun his ecclesiastical career at the parish church of Kilchrist in Strath on Skye probably between 1414 and 1418.⁷⁵ It is conceivable that John MacLean was an illegitimate son of Hector MacLean of Duart who died at the battle of Harlaw in 1411.⁷⁶ If this was the case, John MacLean would have been a first cousin once removed of Alexander, Lord of the Isles. If so, however, it is surprising that none of the petitions regarding John MacLean state that he was of noble birth.⁷⁷

The appropriation of parish churches meant that the Lord of the Isles had diminished influence over clerical appointments to some churches. The Lords of the Isles might object to MacKinnons entering the monastery of Iona, but they had less influence over clerics who sought to hold benefices which were in the gift of institutions such as the nunnery of Iona – for example, the MacKinnons of Mull were associated with churches on the islands of Coll, Tiree and Mull. Finguine MacKinnon not only held the perpetual vicarage of Coll from the nunnery of Iona in the mid-fifteenth century, but also sought to hold the perpetual vicarage of Kirkapoll on Tiree, appropriated to the bishop of Sodor; this church has two pieces of late mediaeval sculpture, one gifted by a MacKinnon and the other commemorating a MacKinnon.⁷⁸ A cleric from the

72 *HP*, i 24.

73 *CPL Clement VII*, 79, 189.

74 The income of the rector of Kilchoman was on average 13 merks sterling and the perpetual vicar's income was 12 merks sterling (*CSSR*, iv, 193; *CSSR*, iv, 228). Only one other rectory, St Columba's of Eye on Lewis, had a similar value; all other churches seem to have been under 10 merks, the lowest, St Christopher's of Uig on Lewis, at 0.5 merks sterling (*CPL*, viii, 469; *CSSR*, v, 85).

75 *CSSR*, iii, 251.

76 *ALI*, lvi, 263.

77 *Ibid*, lvi; *CSSR*, ii, 251, *CSSR*, iv, 191, 197.

78 *CPL*, viii, 469; *CSSR*, iv, 201; Steer and Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture*, 100–102.

MacSherry branch of the MacKinnons, *Maurice* MacSherry, held the perpetual vicarage of St Columba of Mull in the 1390s, another church appropriated to the monastery of Iona.⁷⁹

Clerical recruitment also took men from the professional kindreds or *aes dána*, the folk of gifts. An ecclesiastical career meant no diminution in social status and indeed might be the only viable option for younger sons with no employment prospects within their own professional kindred.⁸⁰ The main areas of learning, which were hereditary, were law, medicine, poetry, history, music and crafts such as stone-masonry.⁸¹ These hereditary kindreds relied for their status on the patronage of the Lords of the Isles and other leading elites. At least ten clerics from the diocese of Sodor can be identified as belonging to professional kindreds. Amongst their number, there are two Ó Brolcháns, members of the kindred of stone masons involved in the restoration of the abbey of Iona in the mid-fifteenth century.⁸² There is one possible MacMhuirich, a John son of *Maurice*, who was perpetual vicar in Kilarrow on Islay in 1432; the MacMhuirichs were the hereditary poets to the Lord of the Isles and the chief poet was a member of the Council of the Isles.⁸³

The links between the Hebrides, Kintyre and the Lords of the Isles are further underlined by *Cristinus Macmarkys* who appeared as a priest of Kilmaluag in Trotternish on Skye in 1428.⁸⁴ He is likely to have belonged to the *MacMharcuis* poetic kindred who are known to have held lands in Kintyre in the sixteenth century.⁸⁵ Cristinus's presence in Skye in the early fifteenth century was probably through the patronage of the Lords of the Isles.⁸⁶ Whilst

79 *CPL Clement VII*, 170.

80 MacGregor, 'Church and Culture', 23.

81 MacGregor, 'Genealogical histories', 197.

82 Steer and Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture*, 107; the two Ó Brolchán clerics are Neil and Duncan Ó Brolchán, both associated with parish churches on Islay (*Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, 21 volumes [Christiania, 1847–1995], vol 7 no.313; *Munimenta Alme Universitatis Glasguensis*, ed C Innes, (Glasgow, 18,540, 61; *CSSR*, v, 351).

83 *CSSR*, iii, 203; Steer and Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture*, 39. We have to acknowledge that there is a possibility that this cleric was not a MacMhuirich, but rather from the *Clan Murachie* who used the name *Murchad* which Steer and Bannerman suggest may on occasion have been latinised to *Mauritius* (*ibid*, 153).

84 *CPL*, viii, 14.

85 D.S. Thomson, 'Gaelic Learned Orders and Literati in Medieval Scotland', *Scottish Studies*, 12 (1968), 57–78, at 73; C.O. Baoill, 'Domnhall Mac Mharcuis', *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, 12 (1976), 183–193, at 183.

86 In the 1420s, Trotternish was probably held by the MacLeods of Harris; however, by 1485 John's son Angus was using the designation 'lord of Trotternish' (*ALI*, 187).

MacDonald patronage can be tentatively suggested for some of these clerics, in other cases it is a possibility but there is little or no direct evidence for it. One such example is the early fifteenth century archdeacon of Sodor, *Cristine Donaldi y leich* or Gille-Crist, son of Donald the physician, who was collated to the archdeaconry having been perpetual vicar of the parish church of St John the Evangelist in Kintyre.⁸⁷ *Cristine* is identified by Bannerman as Beaton, because his forename was commonly used by this kindred.⁸⁸

Another source of clergy for the Church were the hereditary ecclesiastical kindreds; kindreds which had usually become associated with one particular church and who created their own ecclesiastical lineages. MacDonald patronage of such kindreds is less apparent than the territorial and professional kindreds. However, there is one example where such a kindred must have enjoyed the support of the Lords of the Isles. These are the MacNerlins who were associated with the church of Kilchoman on Islay from the 1420s onwards. From circa 1426 until some time after 1463, Donald MacNerlin held the perpetual vicarages of Kilchattan of Gigha and Kilchoman of Islay.⁸⁹ He did so despite rivals accusing him of being 'a notorious fornicator' and of having celebrated mass whilst excommunicated.⁹⁰ Evidence of the absence of celibacy appears in 1463 when his son, *Dominicus* MacNerlin, was provided to the rectory of Kilchoman.⁹¹ The fact that Donald was not ousted suggests that he had powerful backers, presumably the Lords of the Isles.

Clergy from outwith the dioceses of Sodor and Argyll were rarely encountered in the diocese of Sodor, whilst in Argyll there were small numbers of lowland clergy.⁹² The issue of language, the relative poverty of the benefices and control by benefices by the ruling kindreds seems to have rendered Sodor and to a lesser extent Argyll unattractive or unattainable to foreign clergy. There is one connection, however, which seems to have brought clergy from other dioceses to Sodor: the earldom of Ross. During the mid-fifteenth century, the Lords of the Isles spent much of their time in their earldom of Ross and consequently we encounter the occasional cleric from the dioceses of Ross and

87 *CPL Benedict XIII*, 173.

88 Bannerman, *Beatons*, 11.

89 *CSSR*, ii, 127; *CSSR*, iv, 228; *CSSR*, v, 91.

90 *CSSR*, iv, 228.

91 *CSSR*, v, 280.

92 Between 1320 and 1472, there were only 6 clerics from dioceses other than Sodor and Argyll who sought benefices in the diocese of Sodor. This contrasts with the diocese of Argyll where, between 1342 and 1560, approximately 1/5 of clergy were lowlanders (MacDonald, 'Secular Church', 85).

Moray seeking benefices in Sodor and Argyll. Prime amongst these was Andrew Dunoon who between circa 1441 and 1456 held the archdeaconry of Sodor.⁹³ The surname Dunoon indicates two possible origins. The first is Dunoon in the south-east of the diocese of Argyll. The second, and more plausible location, is the Tarbat peninsula in Easter Ross where a well-established family of the name, Denoon, held lands.⁹⁴ Two Denoons appear in the Lordship charters: the first 'Andreas de Dunnowne' in a retour of 1461 and the second 'Davidus de Dunnown' as one of the earl of Ross's baillies in 1475.⁹⁵ The Denoons were also closely associated with the Premonstratensian monastery of Fearn, also on the Tarbat peninsula.⁹⁶ Andrew Dunoon's presence in the diocese of Sodor must be seen in the context of these Denoons' links with the earl of Ross.

In the Argyll parishes of the Lordship, we find at least two clerics with origins in the earldom of Ross. James Wick and Thomas Munro were both from the diocese of Ross, but during the mid fifteenth century they acquired benefices in the churches of Kilcolmkill in Kintyre and Kilmonivaig respectively.⁹⁷ Both of these men undoubtedly held their benefices as a result of the support of the Lords of the Isles.⁹⁸ In order for men from outwith the dioceses to obtain the provision and then successfully gain possession of the benefice, potentially against local opposition, they needed to have support of the patron.

Whilst some clerics might gain ecclesiastical benefices through the patronage of the Lords of the Isles as a result of family connections, others might serve the Lords of the Isles as chaplains and secretaries and through this service improve their career prospects. Papal petitions and Lordship charters provide evidence of five clerics who served as chaplains to the Lords of the Isles.⁹⁹ Of the five known chaplains, Bean MacGillandris went on to be bishop of Argyll, David MacMurchie held the archdeaconry of Lismore, John Lyon became chaplain to James I and then archdeacon of Teviotdale and James Wick became a canon of Ross and was controversially provided to the bishopric of Ross in

93 Cameron (ed.), *Apostolic Camera*, 130; *CSSR*, iv, 197; *CPL*, ix, 152.

94 Black, *Surnames of Scotland*, 205–206. I have to thank Dr Iain MacDonald for suggesting Ross and Fearn as worthy of further research into Andrew's origins.

95 *ALI*, 104, 172.

96 See *The Calendar of Fearn: text and additions, 1471–1667*, ed. R.J. Adam (Edinburgh, 1991) 79, 79–81.

97 *CPL*, xi, 334; *ALI*, 153–154.

98 MacDonald, *Clerics and Clansmen*, 119.

99 In 1388/9, Donald had two chaplains, Bean MacGillandris and David MacMurchie (*ALI*, 239). In 1411, Donald's chaplain was John Lyon (*CDS*, iv, no 806). In 1421, Donald's chaplain was Adam *Dominici* and in 1460s and 70s John's chaplain was James Wick (*ALI*, 240, 107).

circa 1478.¹⁰⁰ Donald, Lord of the Isles, petitioned on behalf of his chaplain, Adam *Dominici*, vicar of Kilviceuen on Mull, for dispensation to hold two benefices on account of the low income of the benefices in the diocese of Sodor.¹⁰¹

These chaplains would probably have travelled in the retinue of the Lord of the Isles and have celebrated mass for the lord and his family. Whilst there was a chapel at the MacDonald residence at Finlaggan, other sites such as Ardtornish castle have no associated external chapel nor do we know of there having been a chapel within the castle.¹⁰² Given that Alexander had a dispensation for a portable altar granted in 1433, however, it is possible that the chaplains celebrated mass in a convenient space within the castle.¹⁰³ The chaplain might also have acted as private tutor to the children of the household. Louise Fradenburg argued that in Scotland 'tutelage was certainly the chief means of educating the secular nobility, and probably played a significant role in any house of means'.¹⁰⁴ The presence of a chaplain in the retinue of the lord meant that they might act as a witness to charters, for example, James Wick, chaplain to John, Lord of the Isles, was the final named witness to a charter of 1461.¹⁰⁵

The elites also used clerics for other functions, primarily as secretaries and notaries. Seven secretaries of the Lords of the Isles are recorded between 1389 and 1475, three of whom also served as chaplains to the lords.¹⁰⁶ The Lords of the Isles used these clerics, who were literate and able to read and write in Latin and Scots and may have also had some legal knowledge, to draw up legal documents.¹⁰⁷ The secretaries seemed to have travelled in the retinue of the Lord of the Isles: Thomas Munro witnessed a charter as secretary in Tain in 1463 and then in 1469 he witnessed one at Aros.¹⁰⁸ Both Thomas Munro and his predecessor Neil Fleming served as secretaries for relatively long periods of time: Neil Fleming witnessed charters as secretary in 1443 and 1447 and he had

100 D.E.R. Watt, *A Biographical Dictionary of Scottish Graduates to A.D. 1410* (Oxford, 1977) 349.

101 *ALI*, 240; *CSSR*, ii, 182.

102 Caldwell, *Land of the Lordship*, 54; *RCAHMS, Argyll* 3, 172–173 (Ardtornish), 173–176 (Aros). One castle within the Lordship which has an associated chapel is Cairnburgh (*RCAHMS, Argyll* 3, 184–185).

103 *ALI*, 241.

104 L.O. Fradenburg, 'Scotland: Culture and Society', in *A Companion to Britain in the later Middle Ages*, ed. S.H. Rigby (Oxford, 2003), 521–540, at 530.

105 *ALI*, 107.

106 *Ibid.*, 245–246.

107 Bannerman describes the clergy as 'responsible for much of the legal documentation that oiled the wheels of local government' (Bannerman, 'Literacy', 219–220).

108 *ALI*, 126, 154.

earlier witnessed charters in 1427 and 1441/2.¹⁰⁹ The contrast between the origins of secretaries during Donald's lordship and the early years of Alexander's with the later years of Alexander and John's lordship reflects the focus of the Lords of the Isles after the 1430s on the earldom of Ross. The early secretaries, Bean MacGillandris, David MacMurchie and Nigellus or Niall Ó Brolcháin, came from either Argyll or Sodor whilst the later secretaries, Munro, Fleming and Wick came from the earldom of Ross.

The MacDonalds' most famous contribution to the Church was their patronage of the monastic houses within the Lordship, particularly the Benedictine monastery of Iona. There is, however, very little documentation regarding the exact relationship between the Lords of the Isles and Iona to illustrate this patronage. Only two documents survive which contain grants to the monastery of Iona from the Lord of the Isles or his family.¹¹⁰ Iona was, however, the traditional burial place of the lords and their relations; for instance, the Book of Clanranald narrated that John, first Lord of the Isles, died at Ardtornish in Morvern and his body was taken for burial on Iona.¹¹¹ John's successor, Donald, was also buried on Iona, having been, as the Book of Clanranald stated, 'an entertainer of clerics and priests and monks in his companionship' and a donor of lands in Mull and Islay to the monastery.¹¹² Donald was also said to have given the monastery 'a covering of gold and silver for the relic of the hand of Columba'.¹¹³ The Book of Clanranald also claimed that Donald became a monk of Iona before dying on Islay and burial on Iona.¹¹⁴ Donald, however, was the last Lord of the Isles to be buried on Iona; Alexander was buried at the cathedral in Fortrose in the earldom of Ross and John died in Dundee.¹¹⁵

The power of the patron was demonstrated in 1443 when the Lord of the Isles threatened to remove the bones and relics of his ancestors and to take back costly gifts granted to the monastery if the monastery did not remove Finguine, grandson of the notorious Abbot.¹¹⁶ The MacDonalds seem to have tolerated MacKinnon control of Iona in the mid to late fourteenth-century, given that there is no evidence of them trying to oust Abbot Finguine.¹¹⁷

109 Ibid, 35, 58.

110 Ibid, 187, 240.

111 'Book of Clanranald', 161.

112 Ibid, 161.

113 Ibid, 161–163.

114 Ibid, 163.

115 *HP*, i, 47; *TA*, ii, 354, 357.

116 *CPL*, ix, 409.

117 Oram, 'Lordship of the Isles', 128; A. MacQuarrie, 'Kings, Lords and Abbots: Power and Patronage at the medieval monastery of Iona', *TGSI*, liv (1984–86), 355–375, at 363.

The 1443 threat seems to be the culmination of a campaign by the abbot, Dominic, to prevent local noblemen from entering the monastery.¹¹⁸ Abbot Dominic's other long-lasting campaign was to repair the abbey; as early as 1421, petitions to the papacy described the ruinous state of the buildings and poverty of the community.¹¹⁹ However, his major rebuilding programme probably did not begin until circa 1450 at which point it was probably under the direction of the mason, Donald Ó Brolcháin.¹²⁰

The monastery of Iona was not the only focus of the Lords of the Isles's religious patronage. The Book of Clanranald claimed that it was John, first Lord of the Isles, who founded 'the monastery of the Holy Cross a long time before his death'.¹²¹ This monastery, the priory of Oronsay, was an Augustinian house and its prior first came on record as an executor of a papal mandate in 1353.¹²² MacDonald patronage may have funded the construction of the unaisled church which is dated approximately to the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century.¹²³ The nunnery of Iona was a priory of Augustinian canonesses traditionally said to have been founded by Reginald, son of Somerled, in the early thirteenth century and whose first prioress was Reginald's sister Bethag.¹²⁴ The Lords of the Isles were probably also their patrons, but no direct grants survive. The nunnery held lands in Mull, including the islands of Inchkenneth and Eorsa, in addition to lands in Tiree, Coll, Skye and Benbecula.¹²⁵

Reginald also seems to have been responsible for the foundation of Saddell Abbey in Kintyre, rather than his father as some historians such as the Cistercian historian Henriquez have stated.¹²⁶ Architecturally the buildings at Saddell date to the late twelfth or early thirteenth century and therefore to the lifetime of Reginald.¹²⁷ MacDonald support can be seen in confirmations of land grants in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries including the lands of

118 MacQuarrie, 'Kings, Lords and Abbots', 366.

119 *HP*, iv, 168–170.

120 Steer and Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture*, 109.

121 'Book of Clanranald', 161.

122 *CPL*, iii, 490.

123 *RCAHMS, Argyll 5*, 232.

124 'Book of Clanranald', 157.

125 *RCAHMS, Argyll 4*, 145–147.

126 A.L. Brown, 'The Cistercian Abbey of Saddell, Kintyre', *Innes Review*, 20 (1969), 130–137, at 131.

127 R.D. Oram, 'Historical Framework', in *Inchmarnock: an early historic island monastery and its archaeological landscape*, ed C Lowe (Edinburgh, 2008), 47.

Creag Bhan in Gigha and those of Knockhanty and Killypole in Kintyre.¹²⁸ Bannerman suggests that the decline of Saddell and its eventual closure in 1508 should be attributed to the forfeiture of the Lordship.¹²⁹

Conclusion

The Lords of the Isles played an important role as patrons to both the secular and regular branches of the Church. They wielded an extraordinary amount of influence over the provision of clerics to benefices within their Lordship, although they may have allowed local lords such as the MacLeods some say over clerical provision. Their control over benefices can be seen both in their heartland of Islay, where clergy closely associated with the Lords held the rectory of Kilchoman, and in Morvern where clergy from the south of the Lordship held benefices. It was only after the forfeiture of the Lordship that the crown succeeded in obtaining control over provisions, although the actions of Bishop Lauder towards benefices in Lordship patronage during the reign of James I show what might happen with a pro-crown bishop. The Lordship's closest relationship was with the monastery of Iona; it was the traditional place of burial for the leading kindreds of the Isles including the MacDonalds and they made considerable investments in the monastery and its buildings.¹³⁰

128 'Book of Clanranald', 157; *ALI*, 12, 71–73, 202.

129 Steer and Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture*, 63.

130 I would like to thank Dr Martin MacGregor and Dr Aonghas MacCoinnich for reading this paper and providing valuable feedback. Discussions with Dr Iain MacDonald about the patronage of the Lords of the Isles in Argyll, particularly in respect of Kilmonivaig, were very stimulating and helpful. All errors are my own.

‘Contumaciously Absent’?

*The Lords of the Isles and the Scottish Crown*¹

Sonja Cameron

In the last decades of the second century AD, the renowned Scottish King Ethodius had barely ascended the throne when he was informed that the magnates of the Isles were killing each other because of a sudden quarrel started by some ‘windbags’ (*sic*) in those remote parts. Ethodius acted quickly. He sent a host to apprehend the evildoers, and the ringleaders were duly crucified. ‘And thus this uproar was happily suppressed’ and the ‘islesmen, who inhabited the Hebrides’ were pacified.² Or so he thought. Other kings had thought it before him. His immediate predecessor, the redoubtable king Conarus, had found it necessary to hang the ‘scoundrels, bandits, robbers, who then were numerous in the Hebrides and Argyll’;³ evidently his success had not long outlasted his reign. The unfortunate Ethodius soon experienced further trouble. A few years after his first expedition, the Islesmen invaded Argyll, committing atrocities, defeated a royal army (much to the king’s resentment) and even when starved into surrender and disarmed attacked the king’s troops with stones when these tried to execute their chieftains.⁴

In the wake of Ethodius, we find three successive generations of Hebridean troublemakers. The first is an evil tyrant who, almost predictably, finds sanctuary on the isle of Islay when he is finally overthrown.⁵ Even though this tyrant obligingly commits suicide, his son ‘Donaldus’,⁶ ‘a man of Hebridean blood’,⁷

1 Author’s note: This paper was first read at the Lordship of the Isles conference at Ballygrant on Islay in 1995. In the time since then, the historical view has shifted to a somewhat more balanced approach, notably in some sections of A.R. MacDonald’s *Kingdom of the Isles* (2000) and in A. Cathcart’s *Kinship and Clientage* (2006). Still, the editor of the volume believed that the points made here are still worth making, so this is a slightly updated version of the original.

2 Hector Boece, *Scotorum Historiae a prima gentis origine...* (Paris 1526) [hereafter: Boece, *Historiae*], V, 82r. I would like to thank Dr Ulrike Morét for bringing Boece’s treatment of the Highlands to my attention. For a general study see U. Morét, ‘Gaelic History and Culture in Mediaeval and Sixteenth-Century Lowland Scottish Historiography’, unpub. Ph.D. thesis, Aberdeen 1993.

3 Boece, *Historiae* V, 81v.

4 Ibid, V, 84v–85r.

5 Ibid, VI, 90r–91r.

6 Ibid, VI, 91v.

7 Ibid, VI, 93v.

invades Moray around 290 AD, kills the inhabitants and hauls his booty off to the Isles. Good king Findocus pursues him to his lair – Islay again – but Donald flees to Ireland whence he returns with more scoundrels to ravage Argyll.⁸ The career of Donald's son (yet another Donald) includes the assassination of a king, two invasions of Scotland with Irish help, unlawful use of the royal title, and finally usurpation of the Scottish throne and a reign of tyranny until some upstanding citizens conspire against him, catch him at Inverlochy, and kill him. This is reckoned such an achievement that the leader of the conspiracy is made king on the spot.⁹

It is time to condense. In the course of the following three centuries, the Islesmen refuse support to a lawful heir to the throne,¹⁰ desert a king in battle,¹¹ stage another unsuccessful rising and betray the leaders for fear of repercussions.¹² This brings us to the eighth century. In the 760s, another Donald of the Isles, a man 'alien to virtue' who behaves like the 'prince of the bandits', continues the tradition of savage and unruly behaviour.¹³ Later in the eighth century, Banus Makdonaldus of Tiree occupies the king's castles with the assistance of the criminal Hebridean youth, calls himself king of the Hebrides, and invades Kintyre and Lorn.¹⁴ He has barely been put in his place when in the early ninth century the 'pestilent Ewan, a man of Hebridean blood' starts a rebellion.¹⁵ A century later, the Isles are still full of robbers and ravagers¹⁶ and in the eleventh century, a certain MacDowell of Lochaber finds enough 'Hebrideans expert in crime' as well as 'Irishmen attracted by the hope of spoil' to pursue his short but murderous career.¹⁷

Robbery, treachery and usurpation: this is the role – the only role – which the Western Isles and their inhabitants play in a millenium of Scottish history according to Hector Boece. The Scots had long been making references to their 'unbroken line' of roughly six dozen kings; in 1527, Boece's imagination supplied accounts of their names and careers, and thus the early history of his country. His was for centuries one of the authoritative histories of Scotland, a standard textbook on Scottish history. This was a misfortune for the rulers of

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid, VI, 94r–95v.

10 Ibid, VI, 96r.

11 Ibid, VII, 114v.

12 Ibid, IX, 184r.

13 Ibid, IV, 188r.

14 Ibid, IX, 189v.

15 Ibid, X, 212r–212v.

16 Ibid, X, 227v.

17 Ibid, XXII, 255r–255v. MacDowell is active during the reign of Duncan I (1034–1040).

the Hebrides, because Boece's formula is simple: trouble equals Hebrides, equals MacDonald, equals trouble. This would be merely unfortunate if his tales had some basis in fact, but all the deplorable individuals mentioned above are fictitious; Boece's invention of a thousand-year history of unruliness for a particular section of his society amounts to character assassination.

This is, in fact, the complaint voiced by the seventeenth-century historian Hugh MacDonald. Hugh may have come from the North-Uist branch of the Beaton family – a kindred belonging to 'the learned professional orders of Gaelic society'¹⁸ and counting in its ranks the author of the *Black Book of Clanranald*.¹⁹ His material, at any rate, derived from a Beaton source.²⁰ Although Hugh wrote around two centuries after the events he describes, his sources were older, and the recognised 'continuity of tradition'²¹ within the area of the Lordship renders late sources more reliable than they would be in other contexts. It has been noted before that 'it is surprising how often the narrative of the Clan Donald historians of the seventeenth century is confirmed by contemporary documentary evidence'.²²

Hugh MacDonald's complaint about Boece is that he 'relates often that the king went to pacify rebellions in the Islands, whereas it is well known that the Islanders are as loyal and less injurious to their neighbours than any people in Scotland'.²³ According to Hugh MacDonald, the islanders are no worse than other Scottish subjects; at times they are rather better. Most importantly, they are loyal to the king. Throughout the history of the MacDonalds (and by extension the Hebrides) according to Hugh MacDonald rather than Boece, the theme of loyalty is constant. The islanders are loyal to Robert Bruce,²⁴ loyal to David Bruce and his successors,²⁵ loyal even to James I who twice wrongfully imprisons the Lord of the Isles and wants to deprive him of his lands.²⁶ The deterioration of the relationship between the king and the Macdonalds is

18 J. Bannerman, *The Beatons* (Edinburgh 1986), 18–19.

19 Ibid, 16–17.

20 Ibid, 18.

21 J. Bannerman, 'The Lordship of the Isles', in J. Brown (ed.) *Scottish Society in the Fifteenth Century* (London 1977), 209.

22 Ibid, 210. Sellar notes that 'the Clanranald historian and Hugh MacDonald are frequently wrong in matters of detail, yet in their narratives of the general trend of events they are usually correct'... '[T]hey cannot be ignored'. W.D.H. Sellar, 'The origins and ancestry of Somerled', *SHR* 45 (1966), 123–142, at 124.

23 *History of the MacDonalds* in: *HP*, i, 11.

24 Ibid, 14, 16.

25 Ibid, 17.

26 Ibid, 38–39.

blamed on evil counsellors who advise the king 'that MacDonald's power was so extensive, that he ought to be crushed in time'.²⁷ 'There is nothing for the subject, in such a case, to be done', philosophises Hugh, 'but to pray to God that he would relent the king's heart to mercy, and to remain patient in hopes his successors may be more merciful'.²⁸ And indeed, Alexander, the current Lord of the Isles, suffers all with exemplary patience: 'Though Macdonald took this sort of usage as a slight offence and disgrace, yet he contented himself, being innocent'.²⁹ He even joins the king at the siege of Roxburgh with 3000 men.³⁰ John, who succeeds him, is 'a meek, modest man'.³¹ Inconvenienced by a warlike son, he resigns his lands to the king, later enters a monastery, and on his deathbed asks to be buried beside King Robert II.³² The dismantling of the power of the Lordship of the Isles is strictly a family affair, and the afflicted head of the clan turns to the king merely for support. The MacDonald lords are 'not disaffected either to king or state', they are 'at peace with the king always'.³³

If Hugh's protestations appear at times somewhat frantic, it may have been because he knew nobody was listening. Since the sixteenth century, it has been Boece's view of the MacDonald lords as intrinsically disloyal and rebellious, semi-independent exponents of an alien culture closer to Ireland who defy the king when they are not ignoring him that has prevailed in the popular imagination. Much has been made of Fordun's distinction between 'wild Scots' and 'domesticated Scots'; remarkably little attention has been paid to his statement that the wild Scots 'were perfectly ready to give their loyalty to king and realm as long as they were well governed'.³⁴ Even today, some historians appear to assume implicitly that the Lordship of the Isles had to be opposed, was unmanageable, and that any addition to its power had to be avoided at all costs.³⁵ The MacDonalds are contrasted with 'crown-friendly' clans such as the MacDougalls

27 Ibid, 35.

28 Ibid, 38.

29 Ibid, 36.

30 Ibid, 45.

31 Ibid, 47.

32 Ibid, 48; 50–51.

33 Ibid, 23; 25.

34 G.W.S. Barrow, 'The Lost Gaidhealtachd of Medieval Scotland', in: G.W.S. Barrow, *Scotland and its Neighbours in the Middle Ages* (London 1992), 105; M. MacGregor, 'Gaelic Barbarity and Scottish Identity in the later Middle Ages', in D. Broun and M. MacGregor, eds, *Mìorun Mòr nan Gall, 'The Great Ill-Will of the Lowlander'?*, <http://www.arts.gla.ac.uk/scottishstudies/ebooks/miorunmor.htm>, 8.

35 M. Brown, *James I* (Edinburgh 1994), 81, 83, and *passim*.

or Campbells,³⁶ it is casually implied (without proof) that harsh treatment by the king was no more than they deserved,³⁷ and a chronological list (admittedly twenty-five years old but still widely used) can dismiss more than four decades (1389–1431) with the sweeping statement: ‘hostility between crown and lords of the Isles’ when the evidence to sustain such an assertion is not only sparse but at best inconclusive.³⁸

With the conflicting portrayals of the venerable Hector Boece and the plausible Hugh MacDonald in mind, I would like to examine the development of crown-Lordship relations between (roughly) 1266 and 1546; for a change, let us examine them as they might have been perceived from Finlaggan rather than Edinburgh or Perth. Boece, complains Hugh MacDonald, ‘relates that such and such kings went to suppress rebellion here and there, but makes no mention of the causes and pretences for these rebellions.’³⁹ Perhaps the ‘causes and pretences’ require attention. How unruly were the Lords of the Isles, and why? And how did they see their own place in the society of their time, in the baronial structure of Scotland?⁴⁰

The first definitely authentic ancestor of the Lords of the Isles was Godfrey, a supporter and father-in-law of Kenneth MacAlpin, the first king of Scots.⁴¹ This would seem to be a respectable start. Unfortunately, for the next centuries the Isles vanish under Viking hegemony and interaction between them and the Scottish kingdom becomes a subtheme to Scotland’s relations with Norway, with the Hebridean Lords neither entirely free agents nor

36 A. Grant, ‘Scotland’s “Celtic Fringe” in the Late Middle Ages: The MacDonald Lords of the Isles and the Kingdom of Scotland’, in: R.R. Davies (ed.) *The British Isles 1100–1500* (Edinburgh 1988), 121, 123.

37 J. Munro, ‘The Lordship of the Isles’, in L. MacLean, *The Middle Ages in the Highlands* (Inverness 1981), 28.

38 A. Grant, *Independence and Nationhood* (London 1984), 232.

39 *HP*, i, 11.

40 Many of the events referred to in this paper have been described in greater detail in previous publications. Some authoritative studies used are: Bannerman, ‘Lordship’; Munro, ‘Lordship’; *ALI*; K.A. Steer and J. Bannerman, ‘The Lordship of the Isles: Historical Background’ in: K.A. Steer and J. Bannerman (eds), *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture in the West Highlands* (Edinburgh 1977), Appendix 2; D.H. Caldwell and G. Ewart, ‘Finlaggan and the Lordship of the Isles: an archaeological approach’, *Scottish Historical Review* 72 (1993), 146–166; R.A. MacDonald, *The Kingdom of the Isles* (East Linton 1997); N. MacDougall, ‘Achilles’ Heel? The Earldom of Ross, the Lordship of the Isles and the Stewart Kings’, in E.J. Cowan and R.A. McDonald (eds), *Alba. Celtic Scotland in the Medieval Era* (East Linton 2000). I mostly rely on the factual analyses offered in these studies – my primary consideration here is the perceived significance of the events in question.

41 Sellar, ‘Somerled’, 132–134.

fully accountable to the king of Scots. This state of affairs only changed when in 1266 Alexander III acquired the Isles from Norway with the Treaty of Perth.

Having said that, there is enough evidence of Hebridean rulers interacting on a friendly (as well as inimical) basis with the kings of Scots pre-1266. Their loyalties may have been divided, but it is hardly possible to state that they had no wish to interact with the kingdom of Scots or indeed wider European society. Somerled was on good terms with David I, and R A MacDonald notes that 'Islesmen are even recorded as forming part of the Scottish contingent at the battle of the Standard in 1138',⁴² before Malcolm IV alienated Somerled with his expansionist policies and Somerled himself became involved in the dynastic conflicts which mark so much of Canmore-era Scotland.⁴³ One of Somerled's sons, Dugald, is found granting an annuity and presenting golden rings to the monks of Durham in 1175, and Barrow's suggestion that he was in England as one of King William's retinue⁴⁴ seems more plausible than R A MacDonald's rather vague deliberations that he wasn't.⁴⁵ MacDonald concedes that a document of 1237 (not referenced) lists Dugald's son Duncan among Scottish barons.⁴⁶ We know that another son of Somerled, Ranald, adopted the mainland and continental practice of giving charters and using a seal with a knight on horseback on one side,⁴⁷ which betokens more cultural integration with so-called feudal values at this early date than more romantic writers like to attribute to the West 500 years later.

The pre-1266 period was definitely not free from tension as the dispute between Scotland and Norway over possession of the Isles moved toward its climax. The rulers of the Western Highlands and Isles did what they could to maintain their lands and autonomy while caught between the demands of two more powerful countries. But R A MacDonald's discussion of Ewen of Argyll between 1249 and 1266 is a good example of how, when there are two possible ways of interpreting their actions, Hebridean lords are not usually given the

42 MacDonald, *Kingdom of the Isles*, 48.

43 A. Ross, 'The Identity of the 'Prisoner of Roxburgh': Malcolm son of Alexander or Malcolm Macheth?', in S. Arbuthnot and K. Hollo (eds), *Fil súil nglais – A Grey Eye Looks Back: A Festschrift in honour of Colm Ó Baoill* (Ceann Drochaid, 2007), 269–282.

44 G.W.S. Barrow, *The Anglo-Norman Era in Scottish History* (Oxford 1980), 159.

45 'The major difficulty with this interpretation is that it supposes Dugald to have been more of a Scottish noble than the evidence would seem to warrant [...]. MacDonald, *Kingdom of the Isles*, 72. It remains unclear what the 'evidence' is which devalues the 1175 record to such a degree.

46 MacDonald, *Kingdom of the Isles*, 72.

47 *Paisley Registrum*, 147–149; MacDonald, *Kingdom of the Isles*, 77.

benefit of the doubt with regard to their allegiance to the King of Scots⁴⁸ – not that the King of Scots had any clear entitlement to it in the first place at the time.

This changed in 1266. At that time, of course, the Lordship as such did not exist, and the West was dominated by three main kingroups descended from Somerled: the MacDonald lords of Islay, the MacDougall lords of Lorn and the MacRuairidh lords of Garmoran. As we have seen, they were not an alien race untouched by contemporary ‘feudal’ influences or without pre-existing ties to the kingdom of Scots in the first place. Except for resolving once and for all the question of allegiance, 1266 is in many ways an artificial date. Further integration happened quickly: around 1268, Ewan, a grandson of Dugald son of Somerled, attested a charter for the earl of Strathearn at Crieff, ‘probably at about the same time that his daughter was married to the earl’.⁴⁹ In 1275, Alexander of Argyll led an expedition on Man for the king of Scots,⁵⁰ and R A MacDonald states astutely: ‘Instead of opposing royal authority in the West, the MacSorleys had become agents of its enforcement, and it would be difficult to find a better example of their integration into the mainstream of Scottish society’.⁵¹ Representatives of the three branches married into the most prominent families in Scotland – the High Stewards, the Comyns of Badenoch, and the earls of Mar; connections which were to become significant for their allegiances during the Wars of Independence. Representatives of all three families are listed as ‘barons of the realm’ who attended Alexander III’s 1284 council which recognised his granddaughter Margaret as prospective queen of Scots.⁵² In 1292, when Edward I acted as direct lord of Scotland during the Great Cause, the lords of Argyll and Islay swore in his presence to uphold the peace in the Isles.⁵³ Trade agreements with, and safe conducts from, Edward I in the years 1292–1294 need not be seen in a sinister light and were granted to various other Scottish barons at the same time.⁵⁴ Officially, the realms were at peace and Edward I was the Scottish king’s overlord. During the same period, King John made plans to extend the administrative system of sheriffdoms further west, integrating the area more closely with central royal policy.⁵⁵ This was another

48 MacDonald, *Kingdom of the Isles*, 117–118.

49 *Inchaffray Chrs*, no. 96, MacDonald, *Kingdom of the Isles*, 128.

50 MacDonald, *Kingdom of the Isles*, 129.

51 MacDonald, *Kingdom of the Isles*, 135.

52 *APS*, i, 424.

53 *CDS*, ii, 621–623.

54 *Ibid*, 635, 698.

55 *APS*, i, 447. *The Records of the Parliaments of Scotland to 1707*, K .M Brown et al eds (St Andrews, 2007–2011), 1293/2/16. Date accessed: 12 June 2011.

step in the continuous process of expanding royal administration begun in the twelfth century, and nothing indicates that the reason was a particular problem with the area. Here and in later centuries, it is worth bearing in mind that the extension of royal control may well be prompted, not by an intrinsic need for such control, but simply by the king's wish to 'bring authority to bear'. In the same period, a senior royal clerk from Dundee appears to have been undaunted by his inheritance of lands in Glassary, Lorn, and does not seem to have feared that he might be in danger from unaccountable savages.⁵⁶

The wars of independence did bring disruption to the West as to the rest of Scotland, as different families joined different factions. In this case Alexander Óg of Islay turned against King John who due to family connections was supported by his rivals the MacDougalls of Lorn, and in turn supported them in a dispute over Lismore;⁵⁷ the Lords of Islay initially backed Edward I until Robert Bruce claimed the throne. Angus Óg MacDonald, of a junior branch,⁵⁸ used the circumstances of the war to further his personal ambitions, fighting (ostensibly on behalf of Edward I) against his rival Alexander of Argyll.⁵⁹ In this, he was no better and no worse, no more patriotic or less, than many Scots including the later 'patriot king' Robert Bruce. More importantly, the fact that the lords of the West considered it worth their while to take sides at all betokens an adequate measure of political integration with the rest of the realm, and an interest in developments at the highest level. Far from 'separatism [coming] into its own in the welter of the wars of independence',⁶⁰ their division, once Robert I had murdered John Comyn and claimed the throne, mirrors the internal factionalism of the Scottish nobility at the time, with the MacDougalls in the Balliol/Comyn camp and the MacDonalds and MacRuairis supporting Bruce.⁶¹ The Bruce affiliation continued. The son and heir of Alexander Óg (also named Alexander) fought and died with Edward Bruce at Faughart,⁶² and

56 G.W.S. Barrow, 'The Highlands in the Lifetime of Robert the Bruce', in G.W.S. Barrow, *The Kingdom of the Scots* (London 1973), at 374.

57 N. Murray, 'A house divided against itself: A brief synopsis of the History of Clann Alexandair and the early career of "Good John of Islay" c. 1290-1370', in C.O. Baoill and N.R. McGuire (eds), *Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig 2000* (Aberdeen 2002), 222.

58 Murray, 'Clann Alexandair', 222.

59 J. Stevenson (ed.), *Documents illustrative of the History of Scotland from the Death of King Alexander the Third to the Accession of Robert Bruce*, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1870); vol ii, no. 615, p. 436. W.D. Lamont, 'Alexander of Islay, Son of Angus Mór', *Scottish Historical Review* 60 (1981), 160-169.

60 R. Nicholson, *Scotland: The Later Middle Ages* (Edinburgh, 1974), 45.

61 Stevenson, *Documents*, i, no. 12, pp. 22-23.

62 Murray, 'Clann Alexandair', 223-224.

after his successor was forfeited for unknown reasons in 1325,⁶³ Angus Óg, who had been a loyal supporter of Bruce since the earliest days of his reign, became Lord of Islay.⁶⁴ Even R A MacDonald, not known for giving Hebridean lords the benefit of the doubt, concedes that ‘...if Angus Óg had been motivated by simple opportunism to join Bruce’s cause in 1306, then it would also be true to say that he rose above it, and he was to prove an important supporter for the remainder of his life.’⁶⁵

It cannot be denied that, as when they withheld support from Balliol, the MacDonald lords had personal reasons for choosing their side. There were after all few nobles who did *not* have personal reasons. The fact remains that at this crucial point in the history of Scotland, the family which was soon to dominate the Lordship supported the crown, while, just to name a few examples, the earls of Fife, Dunbar, Strathearn, Ross, Buchan and Angus did not. Throughout the long reign of Robert I, we find no evidence that the Highlands and Islands were other than quiet and co-operative; a valuable source of manpower for Bruce’s Irish campaigns,⁶⁶ a peaceful province with its established place in the community of the realm.⁶⁷ No evidence of lawlessness survives and no single instance of dealings with England is recorded after 1306; not even trade agreements which might be considered to be minor acts of treason. There is no indication that the Isles were perceived by either the king of Scots, the king of England, or themselves, as a potential source of disruption or intrigue.

During the wars of David II’s early reign the picture changes slightly. John of the Isles was not prepared to stick his neck out for either party in the conflict between 1332 and 1337. He communicated with both Edward Balliol and David II’s regents and was courted by both,⁶⁸ but while Edward III considered him a supporter at least for a while, there is no indication that John ever pursued active policies to justify that assessment. Neither, to be sure, did he do anything to contradict it. While this may not elicit spontaneous applause from the

63 For speculations see Murray, ‘Clann Alexandair’, 224.

64 Angus Óg or a representative attended Robert I’s consolidating St Andrews parliament in 1309 [*RPS*, 1309/1. Date accessed: 12 June 2011]. For matters of identity see Lamont, ‘Alexander of Islay’, 167 and Barrow, *Bruce*, 291, 360 n.124.

65 MacDonald, *Kingdom of the Isles*, 172.

66 The Lord of Garmoran fell at Dundalk with Bruce’s brother Edward, as did an ‘Alexander of Islay’ [Steer and Bannerman, ‘Lordship’, 203].

67 Barrow, *Bruce*, 291–292.

68 Edward Balliol granted him lands which he already controlled [*CDS*, iii, no 1182]; in 1335 John entered into a truce with David II’s regent, Andrew of Moray [Steer and Bannerman, ‘Lordship’, 203].

patriotically minded, it should be seen in context. The earls of Fife, March, Mar, and even Alexander Bruce, earl of Carrick, were at various times found actively supporting Edward Balliol; many lesser individuals also changed sides repeatedly.⁶⁹ When the 1357 peace treaty between the realms was drawn up, Edward III initially considered John of the Isles an ally of the Scottish regents, but in the final indenture associated him with Edward Balliol.⁷⁰ This uncertainty seems to indicate that John's services for Edward Balliol or Edward III ranged from nondescript to non-existent.

John's aloofness might be considered exasperating, but his lack of support for the Bruce party did not set him apart from the rest of the realm, and any damage it inflicted has yet to be identified. It has been suggested that the reason for John's 'hostility' was the failure of the Bruce regime to meet his expectations of reward.⁷¹ It certainly seems that they could have been more generous, but nothing indicates that this was the reason for John's inactivity. Another possibility is that, like many Scottish magnates, John was less impressed with the abilities and charisma of David II's successive regents than he had been with Robert I. In any case, the important point to note is that John's lack of active support for David II should not be considered evidence for 'the separatist political tendencies of Gaeldom'⁷² any more than the active support for Edward Balliol of Fife, March and their associates is taken to imply that these magnates were hostile towards the Scottish realm and wanted devolution for their earldoms. Indeed, mitigating explanations proffered for the actions of these individuals, such as the suggestion that they considered Balliol's victory at Dupplin a sign of God⁷³ should equally be applied to John of the Isles.

Once the Bruce party had reasserted its hold on Scotland, reasonable harmony was again established between the king of Scots and the Lord of the Isles. John's policies and methods were those of any magnate in the realm, seeking to extend his lands and influence through royal grants and through marriages. In 1343, John obtained from the king confirmation of lands granted to him by Edward Balliol in 1336.⁷⁴ In 1346 he sent a representative to lead the Isles contingent in David II's army at Neville's Cross; this representative was

69 B. Webster, 'Scotland without a King, 1329–1341', in A. Grant and K. Stringer (eds), *Medieval Scotland: Crown, Lordship and Community* (Edinburgh, 1993), 237–238.

70 *CDS*, iii, no 1629; *RRS*, vi, 148, 150.

71 Grant, 'Celtic Fringe', 123, 126.

72 Nicholson, *Later Middle Ages*, 237.

73 Nicholson, *Edward III and the Scots*, 90; Nicholson, *Later Middle Ages*, 126.

74 *RRS*, vi, 72.

murdered by the earl of Ross.⁷⁵ In 1350, he married Margaret, the daughter of Robert the Steward (heir presumptive to the throne). Since marriage alliances were supposed to be of mutual benefit, and the heir presumptive to the Scottish throne would hardly have given his daughter to someone he considered either politically undesirable or socially backward, this shows clearly that the Lord of the Isles was accepted as one of the great magnates of the realm who controlled the Isles for the king and to whom patronage was extended in the usual forms. John's sister had already in 1342 married William earl of Ross, another match indicative of the Lordship's integration with the rest of the kingdom. Controlled by a powerful magnate who was accepted as a force in the country and tied by marriage alliances to the royal house and to a neighbouring magnate, it is difficult to see the Lordship as other than an adequately integrated part of the Scottish realm.

This is not to pretend that there were no points of friction. The ever-increasing taxes imposed by David II for the ostensible purpose of paying his ransom to the English king did not meet with universal approval. On several occasions between 1366 and 1369, we find parliament condemning the Lord of the Isles for being 'contumaciously absent' and not paying his contributions; strong measures were advocated to bring 'those rebels' into line.⁷⁶ Of course tax evasion is a wicked crime. David II's concern at losing his revenue from the Highlands, and the outrage of the other barons at having to pay when the Lord of the Isles did not, are understandable. But again, the Lordship's lawlessness was perhaps not quite the kind that topples monarchies. Moreover, they were by no means the only defaulters.⁷⁷ Those model Highlanders, the MacDougalls and Campbells, as well as the earl of Mar and Robert the Steward, heir presumptive to the throne, are criticised by the same sources for the same misdemeanour.⁷⁸ We are clearly dealing with a faction, and it is therefore ill-advised to use this affair to support the argument that 'MacDonald commitment to the kingdom of Scots had hardly strengthened since the 1330s'.⁷⁹

Tax evasion was the only identifiable crime attributed to the 'Highland rebels' during the personal reign of David II. The issue was quickly settled when the king appeared in Inverness in 1369, causing John of the Isles to surrender, submit hostages and promise to pay up from then on.⁸⁰ No further trouble is

75 Nicholson, *Later Middle Ages*, 146.

76 RPS, 1366/7/1; RPS, 1369/3/5-7, 10. Date accessed: 12 June 2011.

77 See, for example RPS 1369/3/5, 1369/3/6, 1369/3/7, 1369/3/10. Date accessed 4 May 2012.

78 RPS 1366/7/1, 1367/9/1, 1370/2/1. Date accessed: 4 May 2012; ER II, 352.

79 Grant, 'Celtic Fringe', 126.

80 APS xii, 16-17.

recorded during David II's lifetime, or after the accession of Robert II. The fact that John's wife was the daughter of the new monarch may have encouraged cordial relations. In 1372, Robert II recognised John's claim to former MacRuairi territories.⁸¹ It appears that from the beginning of Robert II's reign until he was relieved of active power, relations between him and his son-in-law remained friendly. There is no record of disturbances anywhere in the Lordship. This is particularly remarkable since one of the reasons for devolving power onto the earl of Carrick in 1384 was Robert II's failure to control the lawlessness in his kingdom.⁸² As early as 1372, parliament had complained about the rise in homicides;⁸³ the king's numerous offspring ran political and military campaigns against each other; in 1382 the king's nephew, James Lindsay sheriff of Lanark, murdered the thane of Glamis without retribution.⁸⁴ Carrick became Robert III in 1390, and in the same year his brother, the earl of Buchan, burned Forbes and Elgin in a fit of pique, with the by now almost proverbial band of 'wyld wykkyd Heland-men'⁸⁵ drawn from his own lands. Recorded incursions of 'savage Scots' into Angus in the following year were also unrelated to the Lordship of the Isles.⁸⁶ The perpetrators included two sons of the earl of Buchan, Clan Donnchaidh and various kindreds from Atholl and Perthshire, and the campaign was part of Buchan's struggle against the Lindsay family.⁸⁷ Wyntoun's 'Scottis Hieland-men' by no means automatically refers to the Lordship of the Isles.⁸⁸

81 RPS 1372/3/15. Date accessed: 4 May 2012.

82 RPS 1384/11/4, 1384/11/5. Date accessed 4 May 2012.

83 RPS 1372/3/6. Date accessed 4 May 2012.

84 The latest detailed account of this incident is contained in S. Boardman, *The Early Stewart Kings* (East Linton 1996), 79–81.

85 *Chron Wyntoun*, iii, 55.

86 *Chron Pluscarden*, ii, 253; *Chron Wyntoun*, iii, 58–60.

87 A detailed account is provided by Boardman, *Early Stewart Kings*, 180–181.

88 An important article identifies the northern lords' maintenance of cateran forces rather than treachery towards the kingdom as a main cause of lowland resentment [S. Boardman, 'Alexander Stewart, Earl of Buchan, Lord of Badenoch', *Northern Scotland* 16 (1996), 1–23]. The Lord of the Isles was as 'guilty' of this as the king's descendants, but as Boardman's article also makes quite clear, such forces were needed to control lands in the north, and lowland lords were willing to accept this in some cases, though not in others. The king's son maintained Gaelic-speaking cateran forces in Badenoch and Moray. One of his grandsons was accepted as earl of Mar by locals because of his command of such forces. The Lordship of the Isles should not be considered a 'Celtic Fringe' set apart from the likes of Buchan and Mar, but simply another example of how local control was exercised throughout northern Scotland.

In fact, affairs in the territory of the Lordship are remarkably quiet throughout the reigns of Robert II and III. A 'serious breach between the crown and the MacDonalds' posited for 1388 fails to surface in existing sources.⁸⁹ More recently, Boardman has suggested plausibly that the treatment of the MacDonalds in Barbour's *Bruce* corresponded to 'Robert II's vision of MacDomhnaill co-operation with the crown late in the fourteenth century'.⁹⁰ There was a flurry of trouble in 1398–1399, thirty years after the tax incident, caused by Donald's warlike brother Alasdair 'de Yle' who took advantage of the unrest which Fife's attack on Buchan had caused in Moray to carve out a lordship for himself in Lochaber.⁹¹ His actions and the resultant complaints from the bishop of Moray led to government plans for an expedition to the Isles.⁹² No firm evidence exists that the campaign took place, and Donald may have pre-empted it by temporarily imprisoning his brother. However, a year later Alasdair was again free.⁹³ This has been seized upon to accuse Donald of disregard for law and order. However, expecting Donald to keep his own brother imprisoned for any length of time could be called unrealistic in a strongly kin-based society, and Donald may merely have been unable to control his brother just like contemporary Scottish kings failed to control their own families. This is speculation, but no more so than charges that Donald was 'scorning the admonitions of a distracted government'.⁹⁴ Finally, it is worth bearing in mind that local feuding could be found in any part of the country; it is not surprising that at times, members of the Lordship should get involved.⁹⁵ Alasdair attacked Elgin again in July 1402, but offered compensation in October of the same year.⁹⁶

89 Grant, 'Celtic Fringe', 126–127. While the argument *ex negativo* raises a valid point, its sweeping conclusion is unjustified.

90 S. Boardman, 'The Gaelic World and the Early Stewart Court', in Broun and MacGregor (eds), *Mìorun Mòr nan Gall, 'The Great Ill-Will of the Lowlander'?*, <http://www.arts.gla.ac.uk/scottishstudies/ebooks/miorunmor.htm>, 105.

91 *Moray Registrum*, no. 181; RPS 1398/8, 1399/11/5. Date accessed: 4 May 2012. For matters of identity see A.B.W. MacEwen, 'Alexander de Yle, Lord of Lochaber, and his son, Alasdair Carrach', *NQSWHHR* 14 (1980), 6–12. I am grateful to Dr David Sellar for bringing this article and its implications to my attention.

92 *APS*, i, 570.

93 *APS*, i, 213.

94 Nicholson, *Later Middle Ages*, 209.

95 Richard II of England apparently hoped to take advantage of the tensions between the Lord of the Isles and the Scottish crown in the late 1380s: in 1388 he authorised the bishop of Sodor and Man to negotiate with Donald of the Isles and his son John [*Rotuli Scotiae*, i, 94–95], but if negotiations took place, no record of them survives.

96 *Moray Registrum*, no. 303.

However, we are approaching an event of quite a different order from tax-dodging and local disturbances: the battle of Harlaw, 1411. Failure of control was not an issue here, and the 'causes and pretences' are worth investigating. In 1402, the earl of Ross had died without male issue, which gave Donald of the Isles a claim on the earldom through his wife (the result of a second marriage alliance with Ross). Marriage was an accepted avenue of power acquisition, and Donald would have held the same expectations of such avenues as any Scottish baron. However, the matter was complicated by the fact that Robert III had lost his political authority and the country was under the control of Robert of Albany who, with his accustomed political agility, set about manufacturing a claim to the earldom for his own family.⁹⁷ To begin with, Donald did little about it; he may have decided to pursue his claim to Ross through diplomatic channels. In 1406 James I succeeded to the throne but he was in English captivity, with Albany still running Scotland as he had done since 1388 and showing no inclination to retrieve his missing monarch. In 1407, Hector MacLean, the nephew of the Lord of the Isles, visited him in captivity;⁹⁸ hard on the heels of this visit and almost certainly with James's knowledge, English envoys appeared in the Isles to negotiate a peace between Henry IV and Donald of the Isles.⁹⁹ They had presumably accompanied Donald's messenger on his return from England. We know of more contact between James I and the Lord of the Isles around 1410.¹⁰⁰ Finally, in 1411, Donald of the Isles gathered an army and took it across Scotland to meet the forces of Albany's representative, the earl of Mar, near Inverurie. The ensuing battle, Harlaw, has been interpreted as an impudent challenge to royal power, even an attempt to assume that power, by a semi-alien warlord.¹⁰¹ It is now impossible to judge with absolute certainty, but given the prelude to the battle, it appears safe to argue that MacDonald's preoccupation was primarily Ross¹⁰² and that the real issue was the question of

97 Munro, 'Lordship', 26; *ALI*, xxxiii-iv.

98 *CPR*, 1405-1408, 363.

99 *ALI*, lxxvi and 257.

100 *ALI*., lxvi.

101 While there is no doubt that according to the Celtic system of succession Donald could have laid claim to the throne, primogeniture was by 1411 the generally accepted mode of succession to the Lordship itself, and it seems excessively paranoid to charge Donald with claiming a throne on grounds no longer valid in his own domain – especially since there is no evidence that he ever contemplated doing so. See also Munro, 'Lordship', 28.

102 The theory has been called one of 'two extremes of interpretation' [Munro, 'Lordship', 26], but MacDonald preoccupation with Ross is widely noted [cf. Caldwell and Ewart, 'Finlaggan', 148, 161; Grant, 'Celtic Fringe', 128; Munro, 'Lordship', 28-29] and well attested.

ascendancy in the north, fought out between MacDonald and Mar. Further, it seems obvious that Donald recognised the existence of a king who currently happened to be in captivity, and was willing to co-operate with him. It is possible that Harlaw was an attempt to curtail the power of the governor, Albany,¹⁰³ who backed Mar and whom both Donald and James detested. Claims that Donald was threatening the crown are based on an equation of Albany with the king of Scots – but to argue that Albany represented the king would in this case be a rather daring interpretation of the true circumstances. For all we know, James may even have given Donald his blessing.¹⁰⁴

The first serious confrontation between the government and the Lords of the Isles thus occurred not during the personal reign of an adult Scottish monarch, but during the Albany ascendancy. Hugh MacDonald contributes a few pertinent thoughts:

...as long as the king was captive in England, the Duke of Albany the Regent used all his power to oppose [MacDonald]...; and he and his son having an eye to the crown of Scotland, thought such a man as Macdonald might be a great hindrance to their designs and would not forsake the king his cousin on their account'.¹⁰⁵

There was nothing in the behaviour of Donald of the Isles (or, in fact, of Albany who issued charters with his own 'regnal dates' and openly discussed the possibility of becoming king)¹⁰⁶ to disprove this statement. Unless we wish to indulge in speculation without data, the most obvious motivation for Donald's actions is the desire to inherit the earldom of Ross – that is, the desire to be a vassal to the King of Scots for this earldom, and an even greater power in the Scottish realm. To achieve this aim, he was prepared to go to war. This does not tally with any suggestion that the Lords of the Isles considered themselves above, or outside, the framework of Scottish society. On the contrary, it was their ambition to play an even larger role within it that brought them into conflict with the governor, not their insistence on independence from it.

103 'Donald was probably one of the few magnates and certainly the only one in the Highlands capable of withstanding the Albanys'. [Munro, 'Lordship', 26].

104 Nicholson goes so far as to suggest that 'James and Donald might have negotiated "conditional" English help to oust Albany' [*Later Middle Ages*, 234]. The most recent biographer of James I agrees: Brown, *James I*, 58.

105 *HP*, i, 33–34.

106 W.C. Dickinson, *Scotland from the Earliest Times to 1603*, 3rd ed., revised A.A.M. Duncan (Oxford 1977), 203.

Albany's machinations concerning Ross were thus the direct cause of the Battle of Harlaw. The Lord of the Isles had a legitimate right to an earldom, and the governor had abused his power to deny that right to him. The spectacular response of the Lord of the Isles need not be attributed to anything more rebellious than a desire for just treatment.

A general statement by Hugh MacDonald's seems particularly apt in this context:

We know, and might easily prove, that the Macdonalds are accused by many ignorant and malicious writers of treasons, rebellions and such like crimes, for which they have no other grounds to go upon than that of their magnanimity in opposing some of the king's descendants, who wished to deprive them of their natural rights, and who were greater traitors towards the Macdonalds than the Macdonalds towards them; [...]¹⁰⁷

Who won the battle is a moot point.¹⁰⁸ Hugh MacDonald quotes a seventeenth-century comment: 'We know that MacDonald had the victory, but the governor had the printer'.¹⁰⁹ Donald of the Isles withdrew from Aberdeenshire but maintained his claim to Ross,¹¹⁰ and he troubled nobody elsewhere until his death. The events of 1411 had been an exception created by the avarice of the governor Albany, and have tended to obscure the relative peace that prevailed for the rest of the time. This is not a unique circumstance: in the last third of the fourteenth, and the first quarter of the fifteenth century, most of the disruption in the north was caused by fights between Robert II's sons and their factions, not by the Lordship of the Isles. Moreover, Donald of the Isles was not the only one who clashed with Albany – Alexander Stewart earl of Buchan gained the epithet 'Wolf of Badenoch' while trying to defend his position from the encroachments of his brother Albany, with mixed success.¹¹¹ It appears that Albany's ambition was the main cause of disruption in the north, while the blame is usually carried by the victims of his schemes.

Donald of the Isles died in 1423 and was succeeded by Alexander who continued the crown-friendly policy of his predecessor. James I returned to Scotland a year later, determined to neutralise the Albany Stewarts. Within a

107 *HP*, i, 52–53.

108 The Lowland chroniclers' speculations are summed up in Nicholson, *Later Middle Ages*, 235; see also *ALI*, lxvi.

109 MacDonald, *History*, 31.

110 Munro dismisses Bower's claim that Alexander submitted to Albany as 'fable' [*ALI*, lxvi].

111 Boardman, 'Buchan', 15–19.

year, he found occasion to have not only Murdac duke of Albany but also his two eldest sons executed.¹¹² Alexander of the Isles sat on the assize which supported the king and condemned them to death. Thus, in 1424 and 1425, James I's relations with the Lordship were friendly enough and mutually beneficial. The claim to Ross manufactured by Robert of Albany for his son was disallowed, and it appears that Alexander's own claim was confirmed.¹¹³ After this we hear nothing of the Isles until 1428. In that year, James I summoned some fifty northern magnates to Inverness, where he imprisoned them and even had a few of them executed. One of the prisoners was Alexander Lord of the Isles. What crime had they committed? Ingenious theories abound. It has been suggested that 'it is likely that Alexander was intriguing with King Eric of Denmark...to bring about a re-assertion of Norwegian suzerainty' over the Western Isles.¹¹⁴ The evidence for this theory is weak; it is based solely on Hugh MacDonald's statement that, when asked to hold of the Scottish king, Alexander replied that he held the Isles of the Crown of Denmark.¹¹⁵ However, given the number or other chronological confusions in that work, Hugh may well have been recounting a tradition belonging to an earlier age in the wrong context. It is difficult to see what profit Alexander could have expected from Norwegian suzerainty, in particular since James I's government had given him what he wanted (Ross) and left him alone. More recently, it has been claimed that from 1426 onwards, James 'was to find it increasingly difficult to work with the Lord of the Isles'¹¹⁶ and that 'the king quickly realised that the lord of the Isles was neither willing nor able to show even a limited respect for royal authority'.¹¹⁷ Both statements are dubious since no record of their dealings between 1425 and 1428 survives – the reasoning here appears to be based upon Alexander's resistance *after* the king attacked him in 1428. Similarly questionable is the claim that a state of 'cold war' existed between the Lord of the Isles and the king of Scots.¹¹⁸ It is true that in 1426, James I concluded negotiations with Eric of Denmark which confirmed the Scottish crown's hold on the Western Isles. Since a status quo was merely being confirmed, it is unlikely that Alexander of

112 A detailed account of James I's destruction of the Albany Stewarts is provided by Brown, *James I*, ch. 2.

113 'The Book of Clanranald', in A. MacBain and J. Kennedy (eds), *Reliquiae Celticae*, ii (Inverness 1894), 161; Brown, *James I*, 58, 65.

114 Nicholson, *Later Middle Ages*, 315.

115 *HP*, i, 38.

116 Brown, *James I*, 93.

117 M. Brown, 'Alexander Stewart, Earl of Mar', *Northern Scotland*, 16 (1996), 41.

118 Brown, *James I*, 93.

the Isles considered this a threat, especially in view of his good relations with the crown. The fortification of Inverness by the king in 1427 was more likely to appear menacing, and when in 1428 James induced the 'heir' to Ross (whose spurious claim he had dismissed four years previously) to resign his 'right' to the earldom to the crown,¹¹⁹ the warning bells ought to have rung in Finlaggan and Dingwall. It is indeed quite puzzling that, after all this, the elite of the Isles trudged meekly to Inverness at the king's invitation without taking even the most basic precautions, walking straight into a trap.

The surprise in 1428 must have been complete. If there had been a 'cold war', the Lord of the Isles was evidently unaware of it. Any such theory, or indeed any other currently available interpretation, seems prompted by the thought that James I must have had a sane, statesmanlike reason for his extraordinary behaviour.¹²⁰ However, evidence for such a reason is non-existent. Hugh Macdonald supplies his own interpretation: 'The courtiers about King James, and especially the offspring of Robert the Second [...] became his mortal enemies. These being always in the king's ears, made him believe that MacDonalds' power was so extensive, that he ought to be crushed in time.'¹²¹

One magnate in particular is a likely subject of this reference. The earl of Mar, himself a semi-reformed cateran leader in Albany's service, had controlled north-east Scotland since 1404 and had been given a free hand to expand at the expense of the Lord of the Isles.¹²² After Harlaw, his influence in the north-east stretched from the Tay to the Moray Firth.¹²³ The new amity between king and Lord after the return of James I was clearly perceived as a threat by Mar, and it is likely that, as Hugh claims, he used his connections to turn the king against the Lord of the Isles.¹²⁴ It also appears that the king distrusted Mar and only reluctantly decided to use him in the north-east following a council meeting at Christmas 1425 in which his nobles persuaded him that nobody else had enough power to keep the region under control.¹²⁵ Thus,

119 Ibid, 95.

120 MacDougall's reference to James I as 'that consummate master of the pre-emptive strike' (MacDougall, 'Ross', 249) is the closest anyone comes to indicating that the attack was unprovoked.

121 *HP*, i, 35.

122 Boardman, 'Buchan', 22–23; Brown, 'Mar', 40–41. The marked lack of enthusiasm shown by the general council for campaigns in the north would appear to support the theory that the initiator of the anti-Lordship drive was primarily Mar, perhaps with support from Atholl [Brown, *James I*, 96].

123 Brown, 'Mar', 35.

124 Brown, *James I*, 80.

125 Ibid, 81.

it appears that the 'break' between crown and lordship was ultimately brought about, not by James's antagonism towards Alexander of the Isles but by his reluctant endorsement of Mar's power in the north. Nowadays, Mar, whose methods resembled those of the Lord of the Isles and who participated in Albany's disruptive machinations in the north to expand his own influence,¹²⁶ is credited with 'maintaining stability'¹²⁷ while the Lord of the Isles who had pressed a legitimate claim is by portrayed as a threat to be controlled, who should never have had the king's support.¹²⁸ There is no doubt that the Lordship of the Isles was one of the greatest power-centres of fifteenth-century Scotland. Mar's allies may have worked on James's undoubted paranoia. But the mere fact that James was convinced, whether by nobles or by voices in his head, that the power of the Lord of the Isles was a threat to his authority, does not make the threat a reality.

Thus, to acquaint his Highland subjects with his authority, James imprisoned and killed them when they appeared at his court under trust. The way this incident is described in modern accounts is striking. Although James 'invited' the Highlanders, nobody appears to find it odd that 'some were executed'.¹²⁹ James's conduct is given an almost paternal tinge: 'Alexander was taken to Perth with a view to educating him at court'¹³⁰ while Alexander, ungratefully, 'absconded'.¹³¹ The king's extraordinary actions are accepted as normal, and Alexander is automatically seen as the miscreant. However, given the bare facts of the episode, the king's actions could equally be regarded as shabby and highly provoking. He also misjudged the likely effect, for the Lord of the Isles failed to be impressed. If he had been playing the game, James I had just broken the rules.

A slightly different gloss is placed on the nature and sequence of events by Michael Brown. According to his interpretation, rather than absconding Alexander was formally released late in 1428 or early in 1429 with a view to becoming the king's agent in the west, but was persuaded into retaliatory action by his 'hawkish' cousins, burned Inverness and besieged the castle, lost a battle to the king, submitted and was imprisoned for another two years.¹³² The government approached his uncle, John Mòr of Kintyre, in an attempt to

126 Brown, 'Mar', 40.

127 Brown, *James I*, 80.

128 Ibid, 80, 81, 83.

129 Munro, 'Lordship', 28.

130 *ALI*, lxvi.

131 *ALI*, lxvi.

132 Brown, *James I*, 100–103.

set him up as the leader of a rival faction within the Lordship. John Mòr refused, and was promptly killed.¹³³ In 1431, Alexander's cousins Alasdair Carrach (son-in-law to the earl of Lennox)¹³⁴ and Donald Balloch inflicted a defeat on the earl of Mar, acting as king's lieutenant, at Inverlochy. Finally, at the end of 1431, Alexander was released and restored to all his possessions – the MacDonald historian shrewdly remarks that Alexander knew very well that his eventual release 'was owing not only to the intercession [...] of noblemen, but likewise to the disturbances which were feared from the rest of his clan'.¹³⁵ In plain terms: the king could not cope with the conditions his actions had brought about in the West.

An interesting point in this connection is the mention of 'the intercession of noblemen'. Their identity is known: the earls of Douglas and Crawford, and Lord Hamilton, some of the most powerful and influential magnates of the realm.¹³⁶ In Hugh MacDonald's account they are also said to have warned Alexander of the king's evil intentions, evoking a picture of a split council in which magnates disagreed with each other about policy in the north.¹³⁷ This occasion is the first recorded indication that Alexander might, like John in the 1360s, have been part of a faction. Again, it points to integration with the rest of the realm. Like any other magnate, the Lord of the Isles was party to alliances, was communicating with his peers, and the most powerful lowland earls evidently thought it worth their while to support him.

Many modern assessments, however, fail to reflect this, and a more common type of interpretation is that '[i]t had been Alexander's display of defiance in regard to Ross which had provoked the king's action'¹³⁸ – implying that it was natural for the king to be incensed at Alexander's insistence on his legitimate rights. Still, the Lord of the Isles, like any other magnate of the realm, expected good lordship from his sovereign and objected to being treated unfairly. Forty years earlier, the earl of Buchan was similarly driven to distraction by unfair dealings from the current government,¹³⁹ and a few decades later, James II was to push the Douglasses into rebellion through unwarranted attacks. While the

133 *HP*, i, 39; Brown, *James I*, 100.

134 MacEwen, 'Alexander de Yle', 8–9.

135 *HP*, i, 43.

136 *Ibid.*

137 *Ibid.*, 35. Hugh MacDonald's claim that the Lord of the Isles was warned by Douglas, Crawford and Hamilton evokes the picture of a council split into factions with Albany, Mar and Atholl on one side, against Douglas, Crawford, and the Lord of the Isles.

138 Brown, *James I*, 98.

139 Boardman, 'Buchan', 15–19.

king had the right to expect loyalty from his subjects, these subjects may be forgiven for viewing loyalty as a two-way street.

So what had been achieved by the king? His strategy has been called 'a success – Alexander thereafter appears to have kept on the right side of the law'.¹⁴⁰ This would be laudable if there was any evidence that he had not done so previously. Another historian states with equal satisfaction that after his release, Alexander, 'avoided falling out with the king during the remainder of the reign'.¹⁴¹ Since Alexander had never shown any particular desire to fall out with the king in the first place, this can hardly be entered on the credit side. If the aim had been to curtail the power of the Lordship, the stratagem had equally failed – the king's ultimate surrender and the united front of the Lordship had reinforced rather than weakened Alexander's position. From the MacDonald point of view, all the Inverness incident had established was that the king could not be trusted; he had impressed them not with his power but with his duplicity. They had also discovered that resistance worked. If peace was maintained for the rest of the reign, this can by no means be considered the result of mature royal policy.

The demise of James I led to another regency, this time first under Archibald 5th earl of Douglas. Douglas-MacDonald relations had been friendly since 1431, if not earlier,¹⁴² and in 1438 Alexander was again confirmed in his possession of Ross. By 1439, he was also Justiciar north of Forth, and there is an indication that he was undertaking punitive campaigns on behalf of the government.¹⁴³ After Douglas died in 1439, Alexander of the Isles retained his position as justiciar and seems to have stayed aloof from the murderous squabbles between rival factions for the regency. At the risk of being tedious, it is worth pointing out that here again, we see that the Lord of the Isles was not averse to co-operating with the crown and that it was perfectly possible to treat him like any other magnate. It also appears that it was Alexander who entered the famous bond with the 8th earl of Douglas and the earl of Crawford which caused James II to murder Douglas in 1452. Since the Douglasses were extending their power in the north and were neighbours of the Lords of the Isles in Ross, a band of friendship made excellent sense and need not be seen in a sinister context, especially in the fifteenth century which abounded with bands of all sorts. The Lord's role as a magnate in a position of responsibility and in alliance with other magnates is also reflected in a second marriage

140 Munro, 'Lordship', 28.

141 Nicholson, *Later Middle Ages*, 317.

142 *HP*, i, 35.

143 Nicholson, *Later Middle Ages*, 328.

which took place in 1449, at the very beginning of James II's adult reign. John of the Isles, who had only just succeeded Alexander, married Elizabeth Livingston, the daughter of the High Chamberlain.¹⁴⁴ It has been said that in this, the Livingstons were aiming high.¹⁴⁵ Indeed, the Livingstons hardly ranked with the old magnate houses, coming from humbler burgess and lairdly origins. Still, at the time of the marriage, the family held the crucial positions of chamberlain, justiciar and comptroller, as well as having custody of the young king James II,¹⁴⁶ so that to John of the Isles the marriage meant an even closer connection with royal administration. Again, this contradicts visions of an independent mini-king aloof from, or even hostile towards, the Scottish crown and government.

While bands and marriages testified to the Lordship's integration with the baronial politics of their time, however, it was precisely this integration which led to the next conflicts between Lords and crown. James II, with his high-handed approach to exercising power, victimized exactly those Lowland families with whom the Lord of the Isles now had the closest connections. In 1450, within a few months of John's marriage, the Livingstons were arraigned for treason on a pretext and forfeited – the king needed money. In the following year, John revolted, occupied the castles of Urquhart and Ruthven which were due to him through his marriage but which the king withheld,¹⁴⁷ and installed his father-in-law, who had managed to escape from the king's clutches, as keeper of Ruthven.¹⁴⁸ In 1452, King James murdered William 8th earl of Douglas, whose crimes consisted of being powerful and refusing to break his band with John of the Isles and the earl of Crawford. Whether the king really saw in the band something sinister or whether he was merely trying to prove

144 One source claims that the king 'gart him mary' [*The Auchinleck Chronicle in the Asloan Manuscript* (Scottish Text Society 1923–1925), 224], while another assumes that James tried to prevent the marriage [Nicholson, *Later Middle Ages*, 350]. The latter appears unlikely [cf. A. Grant, *The Revolt of the Lord of the Isles and the Death of the Earl of Douglas, 1451–1452*, *SHR*, 60 (1981), 171].

145 Nicholson, *Later Middle Ages*, 350.

146 Ibid, 349; MacDougall, 'Ross', 248.

147 A contemporary Lowland source admits that when John revolted in 1451 he did so partly because 'the kingis awne persoun...hecht him gud lordschipe, the quhilk he had nocht gottin, bot ewynn the contrary in all thingis'. [*Auchinleck Chronicle*, 224–225]. Grant acknowledges that '[w]hen John revolted in 1451, it was largely because of a broken crown promise to give him custody of the castles of Urquhart...and Ruthven' [Grant, 'Celtic Fringe', 128], and MacDougall notes in stronger terms that the 'young fourth lord [of the Isles] could only have regarded [this] as royal treachery'. [MacDougall, 'Ross', 251.]

148 A detailed account can be found in Grant, 'Revolt'.

his power to interfere in the localities is unclear. Douglas would no doubt have seen it as the latter, a centralising encroachment on his responsibilities and independence in his territories. The Lord of the Isles would have agreed, though John himself remained cautiously on the sidelines of this new conflict. Still, the Lordship involved itself in the person of Donald Balloch, who may well have assumed the true leadership of the Lordship by then and who led an impressive raid on the Firth of Clyde in the company of a Douglas representative.¹⁴⁹ It still remains to be noted that in each case, the Lordship's involvement should be seen against the background of their ties and allegiances within Scottish society.

John himself resumed cordial relations with the crown after the Livingstons were reinstated and between 1455 and 1460, he received confirmation of his possessions and continued to participate in administration and defence.¹⁵⁰ The death of James II altered the political scene, and when the exiled earl of Douglas approached John with an offer of friendship and money from Edward IV of England, John apparently resolved to take advantage of the weakness caused by James III's minority, and began to raid mainland districts from Caithness to Inverness.¹⁵¹ This was the prelude to the conclusion of the quaint though famous 'treaty' of Westminster-Ardtornish, concluded in 1462, in which Edward IV of England, James, the exiled 9th earl of Douglas, John of the Isles and the ever more ubiquitous Donald Balloch envisaged the future of Scotland as a vassal kingdom of England ruled by Douglas, John and Donald as sub-kings of Edward IV.¹⁵² This 'treaty' is generally considered the ultimate proof of the Lordship's independent aspirations and hostility towards the Scottish realm. However, the latest appraisal of it has shown that John of the Isles was probably mostly concerned with solidifying his hold on Ross and eastern Scotland, while Donald Balloch was out to cement his authority over the Lordship itself which he appears to have controlled by then in all but name. Douglas, of course, was after the persecution of James II's reign pursuing the only avenue left open to him, the recourse of disappointed Scottish nobles through the centuries.

Edward IV for his part was not secure enough in his hold on the English throne to seriously interfere in Scottish affairs; he probably considered the

149 MacDougall, 'Ross', 255.

150 *ALI*, lxi.

151 *Ibid.*

152 *Ibid.*, no. 75. MacDougall's appraisal of this treaty and the role of Balloch in particular is very interesting and shows a growing split within the Lordship which was to widen rapidly once John submitted to James III in 1476. [MacDougall, 'Ross', 256–257.]

treaty a diplomatic ploy rather than a realistic proposition, a tool to cause trouble for the Scottish regents who irritated him by supporting his rival. An added incentive for John was probably the financial package offered by Edward IV.¹⁵³ If he took the agreement at face value, he was dangerously naive. Even so, the circumstances do not easily lend support to the view that the Lords of the Isles considered themselves rulers of an independent nation or alien to the kingdom of Scots. The mere fact that John was acting in concert with another, Lowland Scottish, magnate continues the theme of integration.

There is no doubt that despite its quixotic nature, the treaty was a disastrous mistake, providing the king with justification to take any steps he liked if it was ever discovered. It was, however, not discovered straight away – another reflection on its effectiveness – and the 1464 truce between Scotland and England made any implementation of the 'treaty' even more illusory than it had been from the start. During the remainder of the minority government, the Lord of the Isles participated in Scottish affairs as usual, was sheriff of Inverness and Nairn,¹⁵⁴ and was represented at parliaments.¹⁵⁵ This continued after James III embarked on his adult rule.¹⁵⁶ Finally, in 1475, thirteen years after the 'treaty' had been concluded and over a decade after there had last been trouble in the Isles, peace was made with England and the details of the treaty came to light. While it is unlikely that the Lordship under John was a danger to the realm at the time, it is not surprising that James III made use of the best opportunity any king of Scots had ever had for curtailing the power of the Lord of the Isles and strengthening the hold of centralised government in the West.

On 1 December 1475, sentence of forfeiture was proclaimed against John.¹⁵⁷ The result was dramatic and probably unforeseen. While John himself submitted in 1476, resigned all his lands to the king, gratefully accepted them back as a parliamentary lordship (minus Ross, Kintyre and Knapdale) and generally impressed the crown with his pliability, his erstwhile subordinates, who would have preferred him to put up a fight, began to raise hell.

It is in fact quite interesting that John was left in possession of most of his lands, with only the legal basis of that possession altered. James III used the circumstances to retrieve the earldom of Ross which the crown had long

153 Bannerman, 'Lordship', 215. MacDougall also shows how John had managed to impoverish his own family in an attempt to retain the allegiance of important families in the Isles during his frequent absences in Ross-shire. [MacDougall, 'Ross', 258.]

154 *ALI*, xliii.

155 *APS*, ii, 84, 87.

156 *APS*, ii, 98.

157 Munro, 'Lordship', 132.

coveted, and to acquire two strategic positions within the Lordship, but otherwise left John's power base intact. A tentative explanation could be that he, too, was more realistic about the significance of Westminster-Ardtornish than has been realised. His actions appear, not as those of a king who felt betrayed, but as those of a king who saw a welcome opportunity to acquire some lands and concessions he had wanted for a long time. To the Lordship kingroups, however, the forfeiture may have appeared as an exaggerated reaction to a misdeed committed a long time ago which had had no practical effect and might have been considered mitigated by more recent good behaviour. They were certainly not going to give up Ross.

John's style of lordship had not been universally appreciated within his sphere of influence. The events of 1476 for the first time let loose the powerful forces which due to his position rather than personality he had before contained. John's loss of authority and the lordship's loss of Ross combined to make the West go up in flames. Arran was invaded in 1477 and 1478, Ross in 1480, 1490 and 1491. Even the restoration in 1481 of Kintyre and Knapdale, a reward for John's support of James III against England¹⁵⁸ did not appease John's kindred, who felt that his meek behaviour was destroying the Lordship. Sometime within four years of it John had to engage in a naval battle with his own son and vassals to retain his position. He lost the battle and with it any influence he might still have possessed. Again, there is more than a little truth in the Macdonald historian's account of John's character and rule, although he sanitises the relationship with the crown and does not breathe a word about Westminster-Ardtornish. John was unable to control his kindred, 'so many irregular tribes of people', and more than likely viewed the final forfeiture of 1493 with relief. He lived the rest of his life at court as a pensioner of the king, and there he died in 1503. He had asked to be buried beside Robert II, testimony to his devotion to at least one exponent of royal authority.

John's son, Angus Óg, assumed control of the Lordship after his father's eclipse, spent the rest of his life attempting to recover Ross, and was assassinated in 1490. His death left a power vacuum which his discredited father could not fill, and the Lordship slowly started to disintegrate, fighting. In 1493, with James IV still under tutelage, the Lordship was forfeited; MacDougall calls it a 'rather mysterious event' and suggests plausibly that it was instigated by the fifth earl of Angus for reasons of personal ambition.¹⁵⁹ However, James IV in person did lead an expedition to the Western Isles in later that year, and

158 *ALI*, xxii, lxxi.

159 MacDougall, 'Ross', 265.

further royal campaigns were required in 1494, 1495 and 1498,¹⁶⁰ before James IV lost interest and left the affairs of the West to his lieutenants to sort out.

John's grandson, Donald Dubh, was born in captivity after his grandfather's forfeiture. It might have been astute to have him brought up at court under John's influence. Donald Dubh, given the right treatment while young and impressionable, could have been used to control the Lordship as a crown-friendly force. However, the overall trend of Scottish monarchy in the fifteenth century had been to destroy individual magnate power over such vast areas; in addition, James IV's chief counsellor, the earl of Argyll at whose castle Donald Dubh was being held, probably opposed such a strategy. Still, it is worth bearing in mind that the crown could have 'worked with' Donald Dubh and that keeping him in captivity was not the only option. As it was, Donald was imprisoned at InchConnel while the king occasionally showed up in the west trailing unkept promises, high-handed treatment, unworkable legislation and unjust as well as unpayable taxes.¹⁶¹ In 1500, he appointed Argyll his royal lieutenant in the Isles, not a move conducive to harmony in the area.¹⁶²

By the time John of the Isles died in 1503, his grandson Donald was 12 years old and at liberty. In 1501, he had been rescued by the MacLains of Glencoe, handed over to MacLeod of Lewis, and was the focus of a rising which kept James IV on his toes for five years. How Donald felt about the affair is not recorded, but it is likely that after a childhood in captivity, even being paraded around the Isles by Torquil MacLeod had its attractions. His recapture in 1506 failed to discourage his supporters. The three decades of James V's reign saw four risings in the Isles under various leaders, keeping the area in continuous turmoil, until in 1544, Donald Dubh escaped for the second time. He was now 56 years of age, and had spent 51 of those years in custody while the government had executed his relatives and friends and attempted to destroy a provincial lordship which he considered rightfully his. How he felt about this is known. On his second escape, he contacted Henry VIII of England who was at the time pursuing a murderous matrimonial policy with Scotland. Donald offered his assistance, '[I]icet in materno utero inimicorum jugo et captivitati fuerimus astricti, et in hoc pene tempus carceris squalore obruti, et intolerabilibus compedibus truculentissime ligati'.¹⁶³ Henry VIII was informed by his Irish officials that Donald lived 'in such dedly hatred with all those that wer

160 Munro, 'Lordship', 33.

161 MacDougall, *James IV*, 176–178.

162 Ibid, 178.

163 *Calendar of the State Papers relating to Ireland of the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary and Elizabeth, 1509–1603*, London 1860–1912, *Henry VIII*, v, 483.

friendes to the Scottishe Kyng, that ded ys, (by reason that he put to deathe his fader, and many other of his friends) that he desireth nothing more then to the revengement of the same'.¹⁶⁴ While his choice of ally lacked discrimination, Donald's attitude is unsurprising. It was, moreover, shared by all the old vassals of the Lordship who rose in his support. For a year, Donald was an added worry to the regents for the infant Mary Queen of Scots, who already had their hands more than full with an English blitzkrieg. However, his death in 1545 robbed the campaign of its focus, and by 1546 it had fizzled out.

That, more or less, was the end of the Lordship of the Isles. The monarchy had won. But whom or what had it defeated? Had it finally subdued a semi-foreign, dangerous region on the fringes of its territory? Had it at last eliminated an age-old threat? Had the crown really been on the defensive all along? This traditional interpretation now appears rather questionable.

The Lords of the Isles were powerful Scottish magnates who tried to expand and confirm that power using the accepted methods of such a process: marriage and royal grants. They were connected to the royal house, they attended parliaments and occasionally held positions of high responsibility. They were also tied to other magnates by marriage alliances and bands, and thus part of the network of kinship and alliance which constituted Scottish society. Like all magnates, they saw their role as lieutenants of the king with far-reaching authority and did not appreciate the king's direct interference in the locality. This was the pattern on which Scottish society had been run for centuries.

Within the territory of the Lordship, the two centuries before the forfeiture were a time of peace. Others have described the cultural and intellectual achievements of the Lordship better than I could.¹⁶⁵ The Lords of the Isles had a sophisticated system of administration, were patrons of the church and the arts, and as far as we can tell, exercised good lordship, of the kind which had once been an essential part of the government of the country. The 15th-century Stewart kings, however, envisaged and created a state in which the king and his central administration gained control of the localities, magnate power was reduced, and court came to play a more and more important part. The Lords of the Isles were not the only magnates who suffered from this growing interest in centralisation. What seems to set the Lords apart from the likes of Douglasses and Stewarts is the fact that the kings found it more difficult to curtail their power, and that it took longer. By the last third of the fifteenth century, the old-style provincial Lordship of the Isles could be considered an anachronism; by the more paranoid kings it was considered a threat.

164 *Calendar of State Papers, Henry VIII* iii, 518.

165 Bannerman, 'Lordship'; Caldwell and Ewart, 'Finlaggan'; Steer and Bannerman, 'Lordship'.

Was it one? All evidence indicates that to begin with, they saw their role as that of magnates in a Scottish context, as vassals of the Scottish crown. They may have looked west at a time when much of Scotland looked east. They may have had interests in Ireland, just like the Stewarts and Douglasses had in France. However, their main ambitions were all set in a Scottish context. They were desperate to acquire an earldom, tied by marriage to the royal house, and keen to hold royal office. They took pride, not in being different from the Scots, but in being the original Scots,¹⁶⁶ and they never showed any desire to secede from that realm. As long as they were dealt with honestly, they were no more trouble than the average Scottish earl or baron.

Regarding their armed confrontations with the crown, it is worth recalling Hugh MacDonald's point about cause and effect. The first serious confrontation between the Lords and the Scottish government had been provoked by Albany's dishonest dealings regarding the earldom of Ross. The next was caused by James I's extraordinary decision to imprison Highland magnates who had come to see him under trust. Further, more minor confrontations had their roots in James II's arbitrary victimization of the Lord of the Isles's allies and kinsfolk. The 'treaty' of Westminster-Ardtornish was absurd and uncalled-for but did not lead to significant military conflict. Donald Dubh's alliance with England, however, was the action of an alienated subject in the face of consistent hostility from the government. Such action had been taken by others before and continued to be taken later – the Lord of the Isles here shows himself to be typical of, rather than different from, Scottish magnates as a whole.

This introduces the issue of double standards. 'Although the Macdonalds might be as guilty as any others, yet they never could expect common justice to be done them by a Lowland writer'.¹⁶⁷ Indeed, interpretations of actions by the Lords of the Isles tend to be less charitable than assessments of the same actions if committed by others. A few examples have been noted. If the Lord of the Isles supports Edward Balliol, it is because his greed has not been satisfied. If other lords support Edward Balliol, it could just conceivably be because they thought God demanded it of them. If Robert II and Robert III fail to control their family, they are considered weak. If the Lord of the Isles fails to control his family, it is assumed that he did not wish to do so and was therefore a disloyal subject and a threat to the realm. If the earls of Buchan and Errol devastate the northeast with their feuding, and if the earl of Mar uses caterans to implement his policy of expansion, nobody suggests that these individuals are enemies of the state. They may be criticised as naughty nobles, but this kind of

166 Bannerman, 'Lordship', 215.

167 *HP*, i, 46.

assessment is at some remove from claims that they want to kill the king and usurp the throne. However, if the Lord of the Isles engages in local warfare, he is quickly condemned as a bloodthirsty savage who is a bane to his contemporaries and has to be carefully controlled. If the king's nephew and uncle fail to pay their taxes, it is because they are part of a political faction. If at the same time the Lord of the Isles fails to pay his taxes, it is because he considers himself a semi-independent monarch and alien to the Scottish realm. Clans like the MacDougalls are called 'crown friendly', even though they did more damage to Robert I than the MacDonalds ever managed to do to any Scottish king.

It was never the purpose of this discussion to argue that the Lords of the Isles were the meek figures of Hugh MacDonald's account. They were not. However, it is time to see their actions in the context of Scottish baronial politics and forget the oversimplifications which set them apart from the rest of the country. Admittedly, the Lordship was culturally distinct; admittedly, it may have been exasperatingly self-sufficient; perhaps the Lords were even better organized than other magnates. None of this means that they naturally considered the kingdom of Scots irrelevant to their concerns, or that they felt hostility towards it. Royal attacks on the Lordship were part of a long process of centralisation, not made for pressing reasons of security or threats to royal authority. The Lords of the Isles were by no means the only victims of this policy; what sets them apart is that they held out for longer. Moreover, the crown's involvement in the Western Isles was less organized, less sustained, than in other areas, and thus created chaos on quite a different scale. In that sense, there was no 'Highland problem', but an 'Edinburgh problem': centralising ambitions unsupported by sustained administrative effort in the area, so that periods of neglect alternated with the kind of autocratic interference which any self-respecting magnate had to resent, which tended to play havoc with the balance of power and were the roots of further disturbance. Apart from a determination to impose their authority, the kings of Scots had no meaningful Highland policy. By the time of Donald Dubh, their insensitive actions had turned an old-style, effectively administered provincial lordship into a trouble-zone which was, for the first time in its history, a serious threat to the realm.

Hector Boece, of course, had justification for taking a different view. The decades before the publication of his history saw rising after rising in the west, and royal expeditions to deal with these disturbances. There were risings in the two years following the 1475 forfeiture, another in 1480, yet another in 1490–1491. Royal expeditions went west in 1493, 1494, 1495 and three times in 1498. The first Donald Dubh rising lasted from 1501 to 1506 and saw three campaigns in the area, one headed by the king. There were further risings under

various leaders in 1513–1515 and 1517–1519. Boece's history was published in 1527. It is not surprising that to him, disturbance in the West caused by 'MacDonald' appeared to be a way of life even in times as remote as 260 ad. We cannot blame him for inventing a picture of unruly Highlanders, since he was probably merely reinforcing a notion common to his generation, and not without some justification. But this picture was recent, and its influence has lasted far too long, with unwitting support from later romanticisations of the 'Celtic West'. Politically, it is time to see the Lords of the Isles not as riotous, semi-autonomous kinglets treating the rest of Scotland as an arena for plunder and mayhem, or even as proud, independent sealords who considered the rest of Scotland irrelevant, but as powerful magnates in the context of the baronial politics of the Scottish realm. Their downfall is part of a complex development in the nature of Scottish government. To see it simply as the eradication of an alien culture on the fringes of Scottish society is an error which lessens our understanding of that society as a whole.

A Maritime Dominion – Sea-Power and the Lordship

Colin Martin

1 Maritime Geography and the Seafaring Imperative

The history of the Lordship, and much of what preceded and followed it, was shaped by the physical setting of Scotland's western seaboard and adjacent islands. This is a maritime landscape of great complexity, in which land and sea mingle inextricably. Although much of the region is exposed to the prevailing south-westerly winds from the open Atlantic, the lee sides of islands and the many deeply indented bays and sea-lochs mean that shelter is usually close at hand, and there are few places where land is not in view, at least when weather conditions allow. Most localities can be reached by boat and the potential for seaborne communication across the region is virtually unrestricted. Long arms of the sea reach to settlements deep inland, while other foci of population project far into the ocean on peninsulas and islands.

Much of this landscape is visually distinctive, and easily-recognised landmarks abound. A tidal range of about 4m induces complex currents as water ebbs and flows into and out of partially enclosed basins and through narrow constrictions. Winds, according to direction and velocity, can hasten, retard, or modify tidal currents in ways modern hydrographers still find difficult to predict. These variables can be exploited by those who understand them, and know from experience how the shifting phases of the tidal cycle and vagaries of the wind create hazards to be avoided or advantages to be seized. Such knowledge is power, for locals who possess it enjoy an overwhelming superiority over strangers who do not.

Here, from the earliest times, peoples' lives and perceptions of the world surrounding them have been shaped by the sea. While direct evidence for the construction and use of early water craft in the region is lacking, natural selection will have ensured that from the beginning its indigenous boats were seaworthy and competently operated. These labyrinthine seaways encourage 'short-hop' navigation in which voyages are normally undertaken in daylight, during the summer months, under good weather conditions, in sight of land, and never far from a safe haven.¹ Such a philosophy

1 S. McGrail, 'The Global Origins of Seagoing Water Transport', in A. Anderson, J.H. Barrett, and K.V. Boyle (eds), *The Global Origins and Development of Seafaring* (Cambridge, 2010), 95–107.

lends uncertainty as to when a journey might be conducted but (relative) certainty that, once begun, it will be completed safely and successfully. Time-based schedules were less important than seasonal imperatives and waiting for the right moment before starting a voyage. A modern re-creation of such a journey was undertaken in 2008 by Sir Maxwell MacLeod, following the 100-mile route taken by his ancestor the Rev John MacLeod, who in 1777 rowed an 18-foot skiff from North Skye to Fuinary on the Sound of Mull to take up his charge and tame the local Jacobites. Like his forebear Sir Maxwell made the journey in easy stages, having previously apprised himself of tidal streams and landing places along the route. He chose his moment carefully for each leg and found the voyage ‘embarrassingly easy. I never went to sea other than in perfect weather.’² Much of the time he was able to exploit currents to carry him along, with oars used only occasionally to nudge the boat into the most advantageous part of the stream.

We can be confident that early Hebridean seafarers usually knew exactly where they were, in cognitive if not in spatial terms. The use of landmarks to establish two or more intersecting lines of sight and so define precise positions or avoid hazards is second nature to inshore seafarers,³ and the varied seascapes of the area, with their distant mountain panoramas and numerous foreground rocks and skerries, lend themselves to visual navigation. Such knowledge was filed away in a seafarer’s mental store of experience and passed to succeeding generations. A rare recorded example defining fishing grounds to the east and north-east of the Flannan Isles was drawn from memory in later life by George Macleod of Lewis, whose family had fished there for generations.⁴ Depth is another guide to position for the experienced. Sounding leads were known to the Romans and are attested in medieval Europe, though it is not known when they were introduced to northern waters.⁵ These devices record not only depth but also, by means of a smear of grease in a hollow at the head, retrieve a sample of the sea bed which, to practised eyes, can impart further useful information.

Out of sight of land, or at night, the sun and stars provide orientation for navigators, while the movements of seabirds and other creatures give

2 *The Times*, 21 September 2008.

3 *Admiralty Manual of Seamanship*, II (London, HMSO, 1967), 523–526; A.J. Parker, ‘Maritime Landscapes’, *Landscapes*, 2.1 (2001), 22–41.

4 G. MacLeod (*Seòras Chaluim Sheòrais*), *Muir is Tìr* (Sea and Shore), (Stornoway, 2005), 105–113.

5 G. Hutchinson, *Medieval Ships and Shipping*, (London and Washington, 1994), 175.

indications of location and direction, as Martin Martin noted during a voyage to St Kilda in a traditional oared sailing vessel in 1698. Singing enhanced the rhythm and mitigated the monotony of rowing while whisky – our source again is Martin – might usefully increase short-term performance in a crisis.⁶

On occasion longer voyages involving passages out of sight of land might be undertaken, while strangers from far afield sometimes appeared, as exemplified by the explorations of Pytheas of Marseilles about 325 BC, in which he reached 'Thule ... six days north of Britain, near the frozen sea'.⁷ A cultural shift from the indigenous 'short hop' mentality to an 'open sea' mind-set seems to have taken place during the Roman period in northern Britain. When Hadrian's great mural frontier from the Tyne to the Solway was built in the AD 120s its planners evidently recognised a seaborne threat on its western flank, which they sought to counter by extending the system of milefortlets and towers, without the wall, for as much as 40 miles down the Cumbrian coast.⁸ This arrangement would have provided security against raiders from across the Solway working their way southwards close inshore, for they would have been unable to outflank the system during the hours of darkness and could therefore be seen and intercepted before they reached the unprotected coast further south. This implies that second century Roman frontier strategists envisaged threats of a short-hop inshore character. However by the third century the province was becoming increasingly vulnerable to seaborne raiders from the continent, from Ireland, and from the north, suggesting a perceptual shift by native seafarers from coast-hugging to open-water navigation. Raiders from the open sea could easily bypass Rome's massive but ponderous static defences, landing without warning where they chose. The most celebrated instance of such a foray is the slaving raid from Ireland around the end of the fourth century AD which seized from his Romanised Christian family somewhere in western Britain the young man who subsequently became St Patrick.⁹

While virility and derring-do (or at least their overt display) characterised the public personae of the warrior elite, caution was the watchword when it came to seafaring. Attributes appropriate for navigating Scotland's western

6 M. Martin, *A Late Voyage to St. Kilda* [1698], edited with an introduction by C.W.J. Withers, (Edinburgh, 1999), 238–239.

7 B. Cunliffe, *The Extraordinary World of Pytheas the Greek* (London, 2001).

8 D. Breeze, 'Roman Military Sites on the Cumbrian Coast', R.J.A. Wilson and I.D. Caruana (eds), *Romans on the Solway* (Kendall, 2004), 66–94.

9 S. Frere, *Britannia: a History of Roman Britain* (London, 1978), 352 and 418.

seas are listed in the eighteenth-century Gaelic poet and Jacobite rebel Alasdair Macdonald's epic work *The Birlinn of Clanranald*. The heroic physical virtues expected of warriors – the poem is a metaphor for Gaeldom's lost culture – are counterpoised by the considered, restrained, and collaborative behavioural qualities demanded of a ship's crew:¹⁰

Personal virtues	Collaborative skills
Heavy and stalwart	Quick, nice of hand, careful
Powerful, free of limb	Dextrous, patient
Sturdy, full of pith	Unflurried, sedate
Stout, big-fisted	Watchful, wary
Strong-grasped, grippy	Sure knowledge
Hairy, sinewy, strong	Somewhat timid
Well-knit, free-limbed, able	Shrewd and cautious
Keen vision	Speaks up when danger seen

2 Landing Places, Harbours, and Anchorages

Places where boats can safely be launched and hauled ashore, or securely moored, are key locations in a maritime landscape. Settlement normally clusters around them and power centres may be established in their vicinity. Until the recent past most such places were natural features – the head of a sea-loch, a sheltered bay, or a sloping beach – which rarely show direct physical evidence of their former use as landing points or harbours. Place-names, however, often provide a clue: for example, *Port na Curraich* on Iona, the traditional landing-place of St Columba, or *Port na Birlinn* close to Duart Castle on Mull. In each case the Gaelic prefix *Port* denotes a harbour or landing-place. It occurs widely throughout the west coast and islands, indicating the ubiquity of maritime activity in earlier times. Natural harbours may also be recognised by their proximity to sites on shore. Thus at Little Horseshoe Bay on the island of Kerrera near Oban an Iron Age fort dominates the encircling arms of the bay, and was clearly sited for this purpose. The adjacent Horseshoe Bay's later use as a harbour is confirmed by the death here of Alexander II during the mustering of a fleet for a

10 The Gaelic original is transcribed by J. MacAulay in his *Birlinn: Longships of the Hebrides* (Cambridge and Stroud, 1996), 73–109, with a translation by Alexander Nicholson.

campaign against the Lord of Lorn in 1249 and, 14 years later, by the gathering there of a Norwegian fleet under Håkon IV prior to the Battle of Largs.¹¹ The sheltered bay at Lagavulin on Islay also has a long history as a harbour. On its western arm is a prehistoric fort and on the eastern stands Dunyvaig Castle, a maritime stronghold whose association with the Lordship is well-documented. It had a sea-gate through which vessels up to 5m wide might pass, fronted by a cleared strip in the boulder-strewn foreshore.¹²

A few natural landing-places adjacent to prehistoric fortified sites and later castles show evidence of enhancement or structural modification. At Dun Ghallain in Loch Sunart a small natural harbour enclosed by rocks and the islet on which the fortified structure stands utilises a natural cleft as a boat-naust with a cleared landing strip leading into it.

Aros and Ardtornish castles on opposite sides of the Sound of Mull became principal foci of the Lordship's power from the later fourteenth-century. At Aros a small harbour-work lies on the foreshore below the knoll on which the



ILLUS. 7.1 *The natural harbour at Lagavulin Bay, Islay. Dunyvaig Castle stood on the right-hand headland, and on the left-hand one was a prehistoric fort. The rocky entrance provided additional security – those who knew where the reef systems lay could easily circumvent them, while strangers unfamiliar with these hazards might well come to grief.*

PHOTO: THE AUTHOR

11 Frisbok's Hakon Hakon's son's Saga in Anderson (ed.), *Early Sources of Scottish History*, ii, 617.

12 D. Caldwell, *Islay: The Land of the Lordship* (Edinburgh, 2008), 34, 54, and Pl. XX.

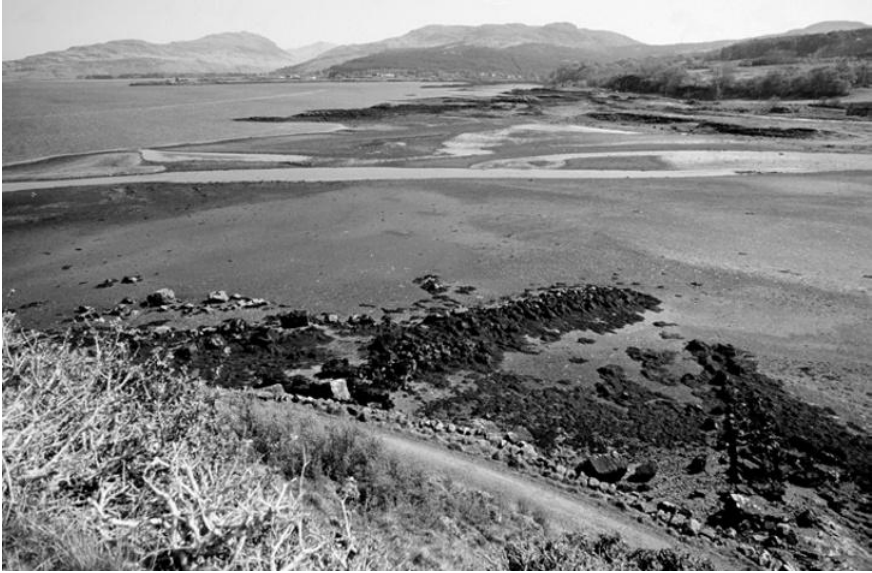


ILLUS. 7.2 *Dùn Ghallain, a late prehistoric/early historic fortified site in Loch Sunart. The dun stood on the high point of the outer island overlooking the secure and hidden natural basin below. A strip has been cleared on the foreshore for hauling up boats.*
 PHOTO: THE AUTHOR

castle stands, and local tradition associates it with the Lordship. It is on record in the late eighteenth century, by which time it was in ruin so it may well be of medieval origin.¹³ The bay beyond provides good temporary anchorage for shipping.¹⁴ There is no comparable facility at Ardtornish, but the castle stands on a headland close to the narrow entrance to Loch Aline, a wide sheltered bay which could provide a large fleet with safe anchorage. Similarly Castle Sween in Knapdale has only a small natural creek beside it, scarcely big enough to accommodate a single galley, yet the adjacent loch, and particularly the natural harbour at Tayvallich a few miles to the north, could easily have accommodated a large fleet. Castles and galley muster-points were not necessarily synonymous since a war-fleet and its contingent of armed men carried its own

13 T. Pennant, *A Tour of Scotland and Voyage to the Hebrides, 1772*, facsimile edition with Introduction by C.W.J. Withers, (Edinburgh, 1998), 352.

14 C. Martin, 'Maritime Transport on the Western Seaboard from Prehistory to the Nineteenth Century' in K. Veitch (ed.), *A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology, Vol. 8. Transport and Communications* (Edinburgh, 2009), 137–167.



ILLUS. 7.3 *The ruined harbour structure below Aros Castle in the Sound of Mull.*

PHOTO: THE AUTHOR

security wherever it went. Maritime castles are best seen not as naval bases *per se* but as fixed strong-points in networks of surveillance, strategically placed on headlands or islands to keep watch over the primary seaways and direct responses by interdependent but separate galley forces. There were probably chains of intermediate signal posts such as those implied by place-names like *Torr na Faire* (Guard Hill) in Morvern or the anglicised Fire Hill above Aros on Mull. The remains of what may have been such a post have been identified at Caisteal Dubh nan Cliar, Kilchoan.¹⁵

Most coastal castles seem to have had facilities close by for keeping one or perhaps two vessels for immediate use, but some are sited where no sheltered harbourage exists. The island castles at Cairn na Burgh on the west of Mull and Dùn Chonnuill in the Garvellachs are notoriously difficult to land on even in calm weather, and offer no shelter or safe anchorage nearby.¹⁶ They were probably places of refuge rather than strategic centres of power. If well provisioned beforehand they would be easy to defend but difficult to assault or capture, while a besieging force, if it chose to sit it out, would itself be dangerously exposed to the weather.

15 RCAHMS, *Argyll 3, Mull, Tiree, Coll & Northern Argyll* (Edinburgh, 1980), 190 and Pl. 49D.

16 Ibid., 184–190 (Cairn na Burgh); *ibid.* Vol. 5, *Islay, Jura, Colonsay and Oronsay* (1985), 265–268 (Dun Chonnaill).



ILLUS. 7.4 *Detail from a grave-slab at Keil, Lochaline, showing a galley drawn up beside a castle.*
 PHOTO: THE AUTHOR

In some places, however, significant numbers of boats may have been laid up in shore bases, particularly during the winter. Below Dun Ara Castle on Mull, the historical associations of which are virtually unknown, is a well-built stone harbour basin some 50 × 50m in extent with a narrow entrance and an inclined boat-landing at its head. While some of the stonework may be relatively modern (local tradition asserts that in the nineteenth century it was used as a private bathing-pool by the ladies of nearby Glengorm Castle), there is no reason to suppose that castle and harbour are not contemporary.¹⁷

A major defended harbourage has recently been identified on the Rubh' an Dùnain peninsula in western Skye, where a shallow loch some 200m long and wide is linked to the sea 200m distant by a stone-lined canal with two boat-nausts running from it. Where the canal enters the loch a stone-built quay projects on either side. A boat-timber found in the loch has been identified as part of a small *faering*, a four-oared clinker-built vessel in the Norse tradition, which

¹⁷ RCAHMS *Argyll* 3, 199–202.



ILLUS. 7.5 *The canal system at Rubh 'an Dùnain, Skye, with the entrance to the loch on the left. To the right is the headland fort.*

PHOTO: THE AUTHOR

has been C¹⁴-dated to about AD 1100. This can be regarded as a *terminus ante quem* for the completion of the canal, since without it the presence of such a vessel in so small a loch which leads nowhere is unlikely. However the canal shows two distinct phases of construction: the first, which takes it as far as the boat-nausts, and a second which carries it on into the loch.

These features suggest that the loch had been utilised as a place where boats could be laid up. Such a facility is unlikely to have been a purely local affair: more probably it was a maritime centre within some wider ambit of power. But there is no castle nearby. However on a bluff immediately overlooking the canal and nausts stands a headland fort of probable Iron Age origin, characterised by a well-built drystone wall standing up to 4m high and cutting off the seaward end of the promontory. It has a checked entrance and internal chamber in the Atlantic round-house tradition. While it is impossible to demonstrate any direct archaeological relationship between fort, nausts, and canal, it is noteworthy that the revetments of the lower canal are built of stones similar to those in the fort wall, and that the fort wall, though partially collapsed towards its seaward ends, does not appear to have been robbed. This implies that when

the lower canal was built the easy option of obtaining stone from the fort was not open to the canal-builders, either because the fort was established at the same time or – perhaps more probably – it was an already existing structure to be incorporated in the developments attendant on the construction of the canal. In other words, no castle was needed to protect the facility because an equivalent stronghold was already in place. The probability that many prehistoric fortified structures in the region continued in use into the early historic era (or that architectural traditions remained relatively unchanged across the prehistoric/historic overlap) is well documented. The castle/galley symbiosis so evident in the medieval period may well have had prehistoric antecedents.¹⁸

At any event a tentative chronological sequence can be advanced for the features at Rubh' an Dùnain. The headland fort was probably the first structure, and was perhaps contemporary with the nausts, to which access would have been possible at high tides via a natural gully. Access was later improved by constructing the lower section of the canal. By the twelfth century the canal had been extended into the loch, where a quay was built.

It may not be too fanciful to see the facility in its final form as a focus of Norse activity, perhaps in its earlier days as a raiding base or *longphort* of a kind that developed elsewhere into towns such as Dublin or Wexford.¹⁹ The loch, with its ready access from the sea via the canal, would have provided secure winter harbourage for ships, invisible from seaward. Here vessels might be serviced or repaired, and perhaps built. Rubh' an Dùnain could conceivably have been part of a wider system, for which there are parallels in Scandinavia.²⁰ Elements of such arrangements might have been carried forward after the transfer of suzerainty over the Hebrides, Kintyre and Man from Norway to Scotland in 1266, following the Battle of Largs three years earlier. Though the historical sources are sketchy, it appears that by the end of the fourteenth century the MacAskills of Rubh' an Dùnain were providing naval services to the Macleods of Dunvegan, acting as their *comes litoris* or coast-watchers and commanding the Macleods' principal galley.²¹ The genealogies of both clans show Norse progenitors.

From a vantage point 35m above sea level a watcher at the headland fort would have had unimpeded views to a horizon 22km distant over a south-east

18 *Discovery and Excavation in Scotland*, New Series, 10 (2009), 92; *ibid.* 11, 2010: 88.

19 C. Downham, 'Viking Camps in Ninth Century Ireland: Sources, Locations, and Interactions', *Medieval Dublin*, 10 (2010), 93–125.

20 F. Skoglund, *The Coastal Defence in Scandinavia: The Role and Composition of the Military Organisation in the Viking and Early Middle Ages*. Unpublished MPhil Thesis, University of St Andrews, 2002.

21 A. Nicholson, *History of Skye* (Glasgow, 1930), 361–362.

to a north-west arc, covering the western approaches to Skye.²² Much greater vistas might be obtained from higher ground towards the Cuillins, from where in good conditions wide surveillance could be exercised over the entire southern entrance to the Minch and inshore approaches from the SE.

It is likely that such bases operated in conjunction with others, and while few may have left identifiable traces there is a strong candidate at Eigg, only 25km S of Rubh' an Dùnain. It lies on the coastal farm of Laig, where two boat-timbers of the Norse period were found during the draining of a moss in the nineteenth century. This was the remnant of a loch which, according to tradition then current, 'the Norsemen used as a harbour for their galleys, while a gap in the ridges of shingle, probably an old water channel, was pointed out as the canal by which they drew them to the lake'.²³ This feature is still discernible, leading from the beach towards the former loch.

Fleet musters might be held anywhere, but several places stand out. As we have seen, Dunyvaig on Islay and Horseshoe Bay on Kerrera are historically-attested examples. So too is Dumbarton on the Clyde, a nodal maritime hinge between the Highlands and Lowlands where a sheltered estuarine anchorage is dominated by a fortified rock with a documented history stretching to the fifth century AD.²⁴ A well-documented episode of large-scale fleet operations is the Largs campaign, in which the Norwegian king Håkon IV attempted to reinforce his hold over the *Súðreyjar* (Southern Islands), comprising the Inner and Outer Hebrides and Man, whose kings had been vassals of Norway since about 1100. For some years the Scottish king, Alexander III, had been pressing for the yielding of these territories to Scotland, and in 1262 he ravaged the Norwegian-held island of Skye. The following summer Håkon summoned his *leidang*, or fleet-levy, which mustered at Bergen before sailing to the Hebrides. There it joined fleets under the kings of Man (Magnus III) and the Hebrides (Dubhghall mac Ruaidhri). The combined force has been estimated at 120 ships and up to 20,000 men. It proceeded via Kyleakin (Håkon's Strait) in Skye and Kerrera to anchor off Arran in the Firth of Clyde, where inconclusive negotiations with Alexander's emissaries took place. Seeking to break the deadlock Håkon sent 40 ships to ravage Loch Long, some of which were portaged across the 2.5km neck at its head between Arrochar and Tarbert into Loch Lomond, where the devastation continued. Meanwhile the main fleet moved to an anchorage

22 Hutchinson, *Medieval Ships*, 166–168.

23 N. MacPherson, 'Notes on Antiquities from the Island of Eigg', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 12 (1878), 577–597.

24 L. Alcock, 'A Multi-Disciplinary Chronology for An Clut, Castle Rock, Dumbarton', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 107 (1975–6), 103–113.

between Great Cumbrae and Largs. However on 1 October (it was dangerously late in the season to have so large a fleet at sea) a storm drove five Norwegian longships and a cog ashore. The following day Håkon landed with some of his men to rescue them, but they were met by a superior Scottish force under Alexander, Steward of Scotland, and driven back to the ships, several of which capsized and sank in the scramble to board them. The fleet then sailed to Orkney, and the *leidang* ships returned to Bergen. Håkon remained at Kirkwall where he died.²⁵

A later source for strategic anchorages among the western seaways is Alexander Lindsay's *Rutter for the Scottish Seas*, a navigational compendium perhaps prepared in connection with James V's naval operations in the area during the 1530s.²⁶ Not all the possible anchorages are mentioned since it seems to cover a pre-planned itinerary, but it nevertheless indicates the characteristics and extent of safe havens available to a fleet campaigning on the western seaboard. Moving southwards from Cape Wrath Lindsay lists *The Narrow Kyle* (Kylesku), Loch Broom, Loch Ewe, Gairloch, the Inner Sound between Raasay and Applecross, Shiant Sound off the east coast of Lewis, the sheltered water between the Crowlin Islands and Loch Carron, Kyleakin (which we have encountered in connection with King Håkon), Aros and Duart Bays in the Sound of Mull, Tobermory Bay, the Sound of Ulva on the west of Mull, Loch Spelve in the south, the extensive anchorages behind the islands of Kerrera, Seil, Luing, and Scarba, Loch Tarbert on Jura, and the Sound of Islay. The list ends with Lamlash Bay, protected by the Holy Island on the east side of Arran, and Loch Ranza on the north. It was probably in one of the latter anchorages that Håkon's fleet mustered prior to his fateful descent on Largs.

3 Water-Craft

Apart from logboats, whose length, narrowness, and low freeboard make them suitable only for inland or sheltered inshore waters,²⁷ no prehistoric or early historic boat remains have yet been found on Scotland's western seaboard. It is certain, however, that effective sea-going craft have been present in the area from the Mesolithic period onwards, since the archaeological footprints of

25 E.J. Cowan, 'Norwegian Sunset – Scottish Dawn: Hakon IV and Alexander III', in N. Reid (ed.), *Scotland in the Reign of Alexander III* (Edinburgh, 1990).

26 I.H. Adams and G. Fortune (eds), *Alexander Lindsay: A Rutter of the Scottish Seas* (Greenwich, 1980).

27 R.J.C. Mowat, *The Logboats of Scotland*, (Oxford, 1996).

hunter-gatherer groups exploiting marine resources have been identified in several places that could only have been reached by sea.²⁸ The earliest identified site is at Kinloch on Rum, where activity around 7000 BC is attested by flint and bloodstone tools together with pollen and other environmental material.²⁹ There is no evidence of the kind of vessels involved, but boats made of skins stretched over a light framework are the most likely. Skin boats in northern and western Britain are mentioned by several classical authors,³⁰ while Adomnán's *Life of Columba*, written in the late seventh century AD of events a century earlier, makes frequent reference to them.³¹ It has probably been the dominant boat-type in the area since early prehistory. Such craft can be made from resources readily available in a periglacial environment – hides, hair, sinew, bone, vegetable fibre, light timber, resins and oils. Vessels so constructed were still to be seen in western Scotland as late as the early nineteenth century,³² while studies of skin boats in post-medieval Ireland demonstrate their excellent inshore and open-water capabilities.³³

Adomnán also speaks of wooden vessels built of dressed oak and pine. Though we do not know what form these boats took it is likely that they followed the clinker tradition of overlapped edge-joined planks, a technique which apparently evolved in Scandinavia in late prehistory³⁴ and reached its zenith in the famous ship-burials at Oseburg and Gokstad in Norway, of about 800 and 850 AD respectively.³⁵ We do not know the extent of Scandinavian contacts with western Scotland before the first documented Viking raids in the late eighth century, but there may have been earlier direct voyages via Orkney and Shetland, while maritime movements around the North Sea rim, already evident in Roman times, could easily have extended up the western seaboard of the British Isles. Metalwork from Dunadd in Argyll shows affinities with

28 Martin, *Maritime Transport*, 137–139.

29 C.R. Wickham-Jones, *Rhum: Mesolithic and Later Sites at Kinloch, Excavations 1984–86* 9. Society of Antiquaries of Scotland Monograph Series No. 7 (Edinburgh, 1990).

30 J. Hornell, *British Coracles*; J. Hornell, *The Curraghs of Ireland* (both volumes, Greenwich, 1973).

31 A.O. Anderson and M.O. Anderson (eds), *Adomnán's Life of Columba*, (Oxford, 1961).

32 C. Martin and P. Martin, 'Marine Boathouses in the Sound of Mull', *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology*, 32:1 (2003), 91–110.

33 C. Mac Cárthaigh, *Traditional Boats of Ireland: History, Folklore and Construction*, (Cork, 2008), 417–578.

34 O. Crumlin-Pedersen, *Archaeology and the Sea in Scandinavia and Britain*, (Roskilde, 2010).

35 A.W. Brøgger and H. Shetelig, *The Viking Ships: their Ancestry and Evolution*, (London, 1951).

Anglo-Saxon England,³⁶ so knowledge of the techniques associated with clinker-built vessels such as the imposing seventh-century ship found at Sutton Hoo in Suffolk could have been transmitted to western Scotland too.³⁷ Influences might also have come from further afield, possibly brought along with the distinctive E-Ware pottery by the Gaulish ships known to have visited the area in the sixth century.³⁸ Ships are highly mobile entities, and both the technicalities embedded in their construction and ideas in the minds of their occupants can be disseminated over considerable distances and across wide networks.

Whatever the antecedents of plank-built boats in the western seaways may have been, the era of Norse raiding and settlement that began at the turn of the eighth-ninth centuries ensured that the clinker technique became the dominant tradition for the next thousand years. The boat timbers found at the presumed Norse-period winter harbour on Eigg are unfinished end-pieces intended for a vessel some 10m long, apparently buried for seasoning. They date to about 1000 AD, and are similar to closely contemporary finds from Skuldelev in Denmark.³⁹ The *faering* of which a component has been found at Rubh' an Dùnain dates to about a century later, while several clinker-boat components have been discovered at Perth, re-used in twelfth century buildings.⁴⁰

Such vessels were the antecedents of that most iconic of ships associated with the Lordship, the *birlinn* or galley of the western seaboard. While undeniably Scandinavian in their main ancestral line these distinctive craft show an individuality which suggests a strong local input to their evolution. Unfortunately no fragment of a *birlinn* is known to exist, and we must rely on a corpus of some 80 representations on late medieval West Highland grave-slabs and later documentary material assiduously gathered and analysed by Dr Donald McWhannell.⁴¹

Although *birlinn* is often used in a generic sense as synonymous with 'West-Highland galley', the type is properly defined as a clinker-built single-masted

36 M.R. Niekke, 'Secular Society from the Iron Age to Dál Riata and the Kingdom of the Scots', in D Omand (ed), *The Argyll Book* (Edinburgh, 2006), 60–70 and Pl. 18).

37 A.C. Evans, *The Sutton Hoo Ship Burial*, (London, 1986).

38 B. Cunliffe, *Facing the Ocean: the Atlantic and its Peoples*, (Oxford, 2001), 480–481.

39 O. Crumlin-Pedersen and O. Olsen (eds), *The Skuldelev Ships I. Topography, Archaeology, Conservation, and Display*, (Roskilde, 2002).

40 C. Martin and N.Q. Bogdan, 'The Boat Timbers', in L. Thoms (ed.), *Perth High Street Archaeological Excavation 1975-1977*, fascicule 2, The ceramics, the metalwork and the wood (Perth, 2012), 317-322.

41 D.C. McWhannell, 'The Gallies of Argyll', *The Mariner's Mirror*, 88.1 (2002), 14–32; 'Campbell of Breadalbane and Campbell of Argyll Boatbuilding Accounts 1600 to 1700' (ibid., 89.4, 2003), 405–424.

vessel with a square sail and twelve to eighteen oars.⁴² Many other sizes and configurations are on record, and MacAulay lists 15 Gaelic names for contemporary ship-types ranging from four to 24 oars and including specialised craft such as military transports and whale-catchers. Regional variations and changes through time will have added to the mix and it is reasonable to conclude that, as elsewhere, each water-craft was a unique combination of the knowledge and capabilities of its builder, the requirements of his customer, and the cultural and technological milieu of time and place. Rigid type-classifications are therefore almost certainly arbitrary and imprecise.

Nevertheless there was probably some element of typological cohesion in the war-craft of the elite, and these are overwhelmingly the vessels depicted on the slabs. While their representation as emblems of power might have encouraged a symbolic rather than a realistic approach, the attention given to technical detail suggests otherwise. This is particularly evident in the ship on the early sixteenth-century Macleod wall-tomb in St Clement's Church at Rodel in Harris.⁴³

An early representation of this ship-type is seen on the Hedin Cross in Man, which is evidently Norse and probably of late twelfth-century date.⁴⁴ No stern rudder is shown, and it was presumably equipped with a side-mounted steering oar.⁴⁵ By the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, to which almost all the West Highland grave-slabs date, the steering oar had been replaced (as it had been more generally throughout Europe) by a rudder hung on the sternpost. A minor mystery is how the steering moment was transmitted to the rudder-head across the rising sternpost. No indication of the arrangement is given in any of the carvings but the most likely solution would have been to fit a short cross-tiller to the top of the rudder articulated by a steering pole in the manner adopted by traditional Norwegian sailing craft in modern times.⁴⁶ The pole could be stowed or removed when not in use, and its absence from the carvings suggests that the vessels were depicted as they lay ashore (or at any rate this was how the sculptors visualised them). This suggestion is reinforced by the fact that a waterline is never shown, and the hulls are always depicted down to the keel. Some indeed show a reverse-curve sheer along the gunwale, which is structural nonsense, but a ship lying ashore and tilted to one side would look

42 MacAulay, *Birlinn*, 24.

43 K.A. Steer and J.W.M. Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture in the West Highlands*, (Edinburgh, 1977), 181.

44 D. Rixon, *The West Highland Galley*, (Edinburgh, 1998), 121 and Pl. 1.

45 MacAulay, *Birlinn*, 56.

46 B. and Ø. Færøyvik, *Inshore Craft of Norway*, (Greenwich, 1979), 107.

this way to an observer viewing it from the opposite direction, especially if the vessel was broad-beamed. Hard evidence for the length/beam proportions of Highland galleys is lacking (they are always depicted side-on), but if, as seems to have been the case, their primary purpose was the transport of armed men, a beamy configuration would be appropriate.

Elite galleys provided personal transport for the chiefly class, and doubtless also served as flagships or rallying-points in time of war. An important function would have been to carry magnates and their retinues on formal progressions around subordinate kinsfolk and vassals throughout the adjacent coastlands and islands, consuming hospitality, dispensing justice, displaying prowess, arranging marriages, and granting favours as they went. Such journeys can be compared with the peripatetic system of kingship which was a driving element in early state formation processes in medieval north Britain.⁴⁷ It continued to



ILLUS. 7.6 *Galley depicted on a grave slab at Kilmory, Knapdale. The 9 oar-ports along the side identify it as an 18-oared birlinn. Note the stern rudder and the upward curve of the sheer, which suggests that the sculptor observed it hauled up on the shore, with the vessel heeled away from him.*

PHOTO: THE AUTHOR

47 M. Herbert, 'Rí Éirenn, Rí Alban, kingship and identity in the ninth and tenth centuries', in S. Taylor (ed.), *Kings, Clerics and Chronicles in Scotland, 500–1297* (Dublin, 2000), 62–72; F.J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High Kings* (London, 1973).

be practised under the guise of sorning – chiefs and their dependents exacting food and other resources while travelling around their dominions – and was explicitly banned under the Statutes of Iona in 1609.⁴⁸

It is likely that the water-craft of the non-elite were working boats of various kinds, though some communities may have been obliged to maintain specified types for their lord's service when required. Where the transport of fighting men was the main function of warships almost any vessel could be employed. The maritime dominion of the Lordship was thus a highly mobile one in which ships, men and other resources could be mustered from a wide catchment area and directed to an objective where it could apply concentrated force, normally with the advantage of surprise. Under a strong governing authority able to mobilise and project such power the Lordship was easy to police and defend from internal and external threats. Without firm cohesive control, however, the region with its scattered geography and numerous isolated concentrations of petty power was prone to rapid fragmentation. When this happened the ease of movement by sea ceased to be a stabilising factor, and became instead an agent of unstructured internecine chaos. A more insidious threat was external technological change, notably the introduction of ships with guns in the late fifteenth century.

4 Naval Power and the Lordship

The 157 years of the Lordship's recorded existence (1336–1493) generated relatively little specific mention of ships and naval activity other than occasional climactic episodes of violence such as the battle of Bloody Bay in c.1481, when the last Lord, John II, was routed by his son Angus Óg. Nevertheless it is clear that the Lordship was essentially a sea kingdom held together by a network of maritime communications whose day-to-day activities at sea were so commonplace as to merit few written records. What little material there is, much of it peripheral and oblique, has been masterfully analysed by Dr David Caldwell in this volume.

As argued above, the maritime environment on Scotland's western seaboard has driven the fundamentals of human settlement, movement, and power in predictable directions, encouraging continuity rather than change. Our earliest ship-related record in the area is associated with the Dalriadan expansion from Ireland in the sixth century AD, and the forging of a kingdom in Argyll

48 R.A. Dodgshon, *From Chiefs to Landlords: Social and Economic Change in the Western Highlands and Islands, c. 1493–1820*, (Edinburgh, 1998), 104–107.

(*Airer Gáidel*, or Coastland of the Gaels), which was achieved and sustained by organised naval force. A tenth-century compilation which incorporates mid seventh-century sources, *Senchus Fer nAlban* (History of the Men of Scotland), records that Dalriada contained 1410 households, each 20 of which was obliged to provide two seven-benched boats for the king's service. If there were two men to each bench, or cross-thwart, this means that the 140 vessels of the fully mobilised fleet would have required some 2000 rowers plus supernumeraries.⁴⁹ Though it is unlikely that all the craft (far less the men) would have been called out for service at the same time, these figures nevertheless emphasise the magnitude of Dalriada's naval resources. That Somerled could muster an even greater force in the same area six centuries later is indicated by the account of his death at Renfrew in 1164 in the *Chronicle of Man*, which notes that his fleet was 160-strong.⁵⁰ It is likely that the Lordship's maritime assets were no less robust. Late tradition claims that even after its demise, Donald Dubh was able to muster 180 ships for his final attempt to reclaim the Lordship in 1545.⁵¹

The primary purpose of such vessels was to carry armed men, who while at sea could work the sails and oars. Galleys operating in concert with shore-based surveillance networks of strategic strongholds and watch-posts could concentrate force to counter external threats or, in an offensive capacity, utilise mobility and armed force to focus violence on a distant enemy's bases or resources. Should things go wrong they could with equal facility flee. Though on rare occasions fleet might encounter fleet in the waterborne equivalent of a land battle, for the most part sea power was exercised by exploiting small-scale and sharply focused maritime mobility.

In 1462 John II, Lord of the Isles, met Edward IV's commissioners at Ardtornish Castle in the Sound of Mull to negotiate a secret treaty under which he aligned himself to the English crown in the event of Scotland being invaded.⁵² Though never activated, this was a treacherous and deeply hostile act against the Scottish king, James III, who on learning of it in 1476 stripped John of his titles and properties as the Earl of Ross, though for a time he was allowed to retain the Lordship. However John's weakness as a military leader and incompetence as a politician brought chronic instability to the area, and

49 Nieke, *Secular Society*, 61–62.

50 Chron Man, s.a. 1164.

51 *csp Ireland*, i, 72–73 refers to the assembly of 4000 men under Donald's command at Carrickfergus but gives no numbers of ships to transport them.

52 D. Gregory, *The History of the Western Highlands and Isles of Scotland 1493–1625*, (reprinted, Edinburgh, 2008), 40.

in 1493 James IV passed sentence of forfeiture against him, abolishing the Lordship as a quasi-independent maritime entity.⁵³

That James had the physical means to impose these draconian strictures rested on his possession of a revolutionary new weapon. Towards the end of the fifteenth century European monarchs were beginning to arm the big three-masted sailing ships which had evolved in the Mediterranean with increasingly heavy and effective artillery.⁵⁴ This combination allowed latent violence to be carried, irrespective of distance, to any place accessible by sea, where it could be applied with precision and effect.⁵⁵ Over coming centuries the formula would allow European maritime nations to create, secure, and exploit empires on a global scale.⁵⁶ James IV was to make an early if largely abortive contribution to this revolution with the launch of his great warship *Michael* in 1511.⁵⁷ But in 1493 that lay in the future. The 20-year-old monarch was still in his minority, having inherited what was in European terms a small, unstable, and impoverished kingdom. Even so, he clearly understood the potential of sea power as a means of exerting influence backed by the threat of swift and effective violence in remote and otherwise inaccessible parts of his realm. This strategic capability was particularly apposite to the previously intractable problem of controlling the Lordship, for the network of maritime castles on which its cohesion largely depended were themselves, because of their dominating positions on the coast, vulnerable to attack from the sea by shipborne artillery.

In August 1493 James, accompanied by senior magnates, mounted a sea-borne expedition to Dunstaffnage Castle and its large protected anchorage in the Firth of Lorn. Though little is known of its outcome, the campaign was a demonstration of how far the king's arm could now reach,⁵⁸ and naval developments dominated the rest of his reign. Over the winter of 1494–5 royal accounts show the start of a concerted shipbuilding programme and the following summer James mounted a second expedition to the west, embarking at Dumbarton and proceeding by way of the Clyde to Bute and thence to Kintyre before

53 N. Macdougall, *James IV*, (Edinburgh, 1989), 100–102.

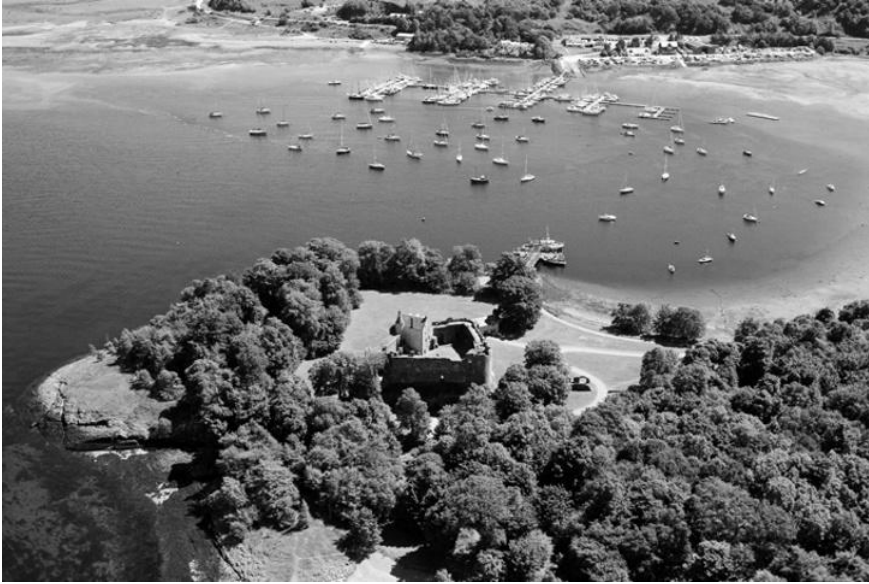
54 I. Friel, *The Good Ship: Ships, Shipbuilding and Technology in England 1200–1520*, (London, 1995), 86–90.

55 J. Glete, *Warfare at Sea, 1500–1650: Maritime Conflicts and the Transformation of Europe*, (London, 2000).

56 C. Cippola, *Guns and Sails in the Early Phase of European Expansion*, (London, 1965).

57 N. Macdougall, “The greatest scheip that ewer saillit in Ingland or France”: James IV’s “Great Michael”, in N. Macdougall (ed.), *Scotland and War ad 79–1918*, (Edinburgh, 1991), 36–60.

58 Macdougall, *James IV*, 102–103.



ILLUS. 7.7 *Dunstaffnage Castle, near Oban, with its sheltered anchorage beyond.*

PHOTO: THE AUTHOR

anchoring off Mingary Castle in Ardnamurchan.⁵⁹ What the visit achieved is not known, but the king no doubt used the combination of a show of force, royal hospitality, and the granting of favours to reinforce his authority in the area, just as his galley-borne sorning predecessors had done before.

A further expedition to the Isles took place in 1504, unaccompanied by the king. This time the application of shipborne mobility and firepower was put to the test. The objective was Cairn na Burgh off Mull, a fortified stronghold occupied by the rebel Donald Dubh, fugitive claimant to the now defunct Lordship. Since the fleet's gunpowder and roundshot had to be replenished during the attack it is clear that shipboard artillery was actively involved. Cairn na Burgh fell, though whether by surrender or assault is not clear.⁶⁰ Two years later a ship called the *Raven* was sent to capture Stornoway Castle in Lewis.⁶¹

Further attempts to pacify or 'daunt' Scotland's western seaboard were curtailed by James IV's death at Flodden in 1513. They were renewed by his son and successor, James V, who after a difficult minority assumed full power in 1528 and took vigorous steps to assert his authority in the more inaccessible

59 Ibid., 115.

60 Ibid, 185–186.

61 Gregory, *Western Highlands*; Macdougall, *James IV*, 179–189.

parts of his troubled realm. A royal progression through the lawless Border area during the summer of 1530 culminated in the hanging of Johnny Armstrong, a noted reiver whose many crimes were compounded by his presumption in treating the young king as an equal when they met.⁶² Shortly afterwards a naval expedition to the Western Isles was proposed. By early 1531 preparations were under way for a new 'daunting', and James wrote to his friend and ally Francis I of France informing him of his intention to blow the Islesmen out of their ships and castles with his 'culverin'.⁶³ It is possible that the culverin concerned is none other than the remarkable bronze gun blazoned with the emblems of Francis I which now sits outside Inveraray Castle.⁶⁴

Whether the 1531 campaign took place is unclear, since most of the recalcitrant chiefs submitted that summer, no doubt encouraged by news of Johnny Armstrong's fate. However the royal accounts record a payment in April 1531 'for the Kingis passing in the Illis', suggesting a maritime visitation of some kind.⁶⁵ In 1536 James left Fife on an abortive journey to France, which was abandoned in Galloway after a circumnavigation of Scotland.⁶⁶ It was probably in connection with this voyage that Alexander Lindsay's *Rutter for the Scottish Seas* was compiled (see above, p. 187).

In 1540 the king took a fleet 'to the north and south isles [of the Hebrides] for the ordouring of thame in justice and gude policy'. Relatively little is known of the campaign because of secrecy surrounding its objectives, but three letters from English agents provide some details of its preparation.⁶⁷ The first two, dated 4 May, reported the mustering of twelve ships at Leith, all well provided with artillery. Various Scots lords had been ordered to attend the king in person. A third letter, of 29 May, noted that James's fleet was by this time sixteen strong, and included 'the *Salamandry* which the French king [Francis I] gave him'. Passenger vessels were provided for the nobility, together with three victuallers, a hulk for baggage, and a reconnaissance craft. Between three and four thousand men were embarked. According to a later chronicler (in 1570) the fleet sailed via Orkney to Skye, Lewis, and 'the rest of the Isles', eventually reaching Dumbarton where the king disembarked.⁶⁸ Precisely what this 'daunting' achieved is not known, although there is no further evidence of

62 J. Cameron, *James V: the Personal Rule, 1528–1542*, (Edinburgh, 1998), 78–83.

63 Ibid, 231.

64 R.J. Knecht, 'The Duke of Argyll's Cannon', *History Scotland*, 8.2 (2008), 21–29.

65 Cameron, *James V*, 228–232.

66 Ibid, 239.

67 Ibid, 245–248; Adams and Fortune, *Rutter*, 13–15.

68 Ibid, 13–15.

rebellion in the region until 1545. By then both James and Donald Dubh were dead and the Lordship no more than a distant memory.

In the latter part of the sixteenth century English ships were regularly operating in the Irish Sea and its northern approaches. Their activities focused mainly on intercepting Highland mercenaries (galloglasses) travelling to aid their Gaelic kinsmen in Ulster, a practice which from the early days of the Lordship had frustrated England's efforts to complete the subjugation of Ireland.⁶⁹ Though light sailing warships could rarely out-manoeuvre a galley they could attack the supporting network of castles or put troops ashore at key points. A policy of planting English and Scottish settlers in disaffected parts of Ireland followed in the early seventeenth century. Earlier, in 1597, James VI had encouraged 'Adventurers' from Fife to colonise Lewis on a similar basis, and although the attempt failed the principle was established that title to land could be granted only by the crown and was no longer sustainable on the traditional and undocumented genealogical assertions which had hitherto prevailed. This reinforced royal authority and replaced the sword (in theory at least) with legal process rooted in the centrally administered law of the state as the sole arbiter of territorial rights.⁷⁰ These changes were exploited by some clans, notably the Campbells, to dispossess rivals such as the former Macdonald Lords of the Isles and the Macleans of Duart of their traditional lands. The Union of the Crowns in 1603 drove a further wedge between mainland Britain and the Gaelic west, and by the early seventeenth century the process of naval outreach to control Argyll and the Isles, envisaged by James IV more than a century earlier, was at last being put into rather desultory effect by his great-grandson, James VI and I.

In 1608 Lord Ochiltree embarked on a naval campaign in the west of Scotland accompanied by Andrew Knox, Bishop of the Isles. Four ships and ten 'barkis' were involved, carrying a total of 900 men. Enticed by the prospect of a sermon by the Bishop, a number of leading chieftains came aboard the flagship off the old Lordship castle of Aros in the Sound of Mull. They were arrested and confined to various prisons from which they were only released the following year after agreeing to conditions prescribed in a document entitled 'the Band and Statutes of Icomkil [Iona]'. This required them to accept responsibility for the behaviour of their clans and acknowledge the primacy of the reformed Church. It prohibited sorning, and restrictions were placed on the consumption of strong drink. The activities of bards, whose heroic poetry was regarded as subversive, were explicitly banned. The use of firearms was

69 G.A. Hayes-McCoy, *Scots Mercenary Forces in Ireland, 1565–1003*, (Dublin, 1937).

70 M. Lynch, *Scotland: A New History* (London, 1991), 242.

forbidden, even for game, while the elder sons of gentry were to be sent to the Lowlands to learn English. Further conditions were ratified by legislation in 1616, restricting each chief to a single *birlinn* of 16 or 18 oars. Other requirements included a limit on the size of chiefly households.⁷¹

Ochiltree had been ordered to destroy all the chiefs' 'lympads, galleys and birlinns', apart from those needed to transport the King's rent to the mainland, but in the event this draconian stricture does not seem to have been imposed. Though traditional galleys continued to be used in the west until the eighteenth century (the last known example was built in 1706) their offensive capability had become neutralised by the growing presence of armed sailing ships, and as instruments of maritime power they were now obsolete.

The constitutional and religious upheavals of the seventeenth century led to several later naval expeditions to the area. In 1644 Alastair MacColla brought an army of Irish Macdonnells from Antrim to support the royalist Marquis of Montrose against the Presbyterian Marquis of Argyll. MacColla's troops landed at Mingary in Ardnamurchan and captured the castle.⁷² The subsequent naval battle with five of Argyll's ships probably explains the seventeenth century shipwreck recently discovered in this locality.⁷³ One of Argyll's vessels may have been the *Swan*, a ship recorded as being in service with the Campbells under Captain James Brown in late 1644.⁷⁴

A ship called the *Swan* was wrecked off Duart Castle during the Cromwellian invasion of Mull in September 1653,⁷⁵ and circumstantial evidence suggests that it may be Argyll's former vessel, sold into State service shortly before she was lost. The wreck has been found and excavated. The surviving remains indicate a three-masted warship with a keel 60 feet long, a beam of 25 feet, and a laden displacement of about 134 tons. She appears to have had two forward-firing six-pounders in the bow and six more pieces aft. No guns appear to have been mounted amidships, and documentary sources indicate that the ship was provided with oars.⁷⁶ She may perhaps have been conceived as a 'super-galley', combining the advantages of a gun-carrying sailing ship with the versatility of auxiliary oar power. Wood carvings associated with the stern decoration show

71 Gregory, *Western Highlands*, 321–333.

72 D. Stevenson, *Highland Warrior: Alasdair MacColla and the Civil Wars*, (Edinburgh, 2003), 111–114; A. Campbell, *A History of Clan Campbell, Vol. 2: From Flodden to the Restoration*, (Edinburgh, 2002), 217.

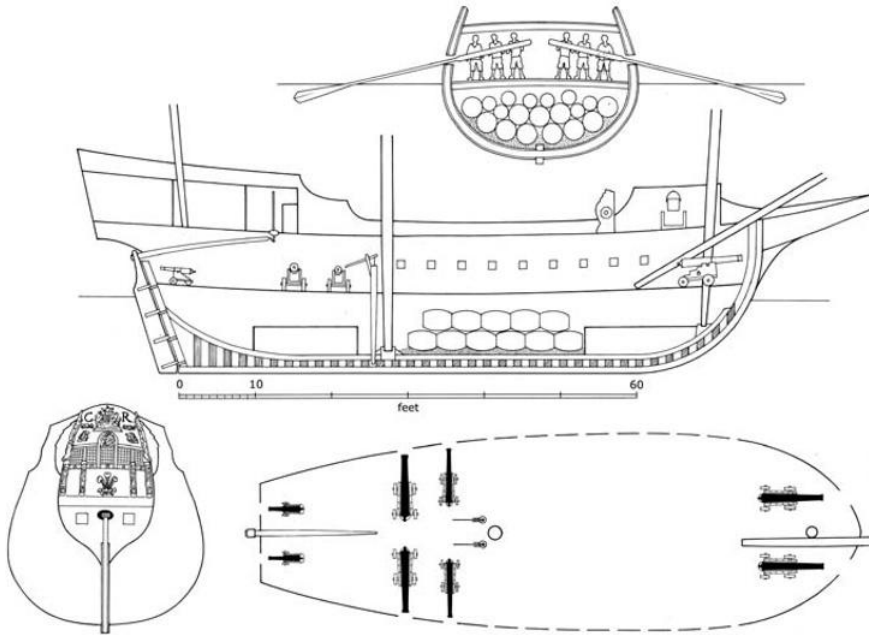
73 Wessex Archaeology, *Mingary, Ardnamurchan, The Sound of Mull*, unpublished Designated Site Assessment for Historic Scotland, 2007.

74 Campbell, *Clan Campbell*, 217.

75 F. Dow, *Cromwellian Scotland*, (Edinburgh, 1979), 78–98.

76 C. Martin, *A Cromwellian Shipwreck off Duart Point, Mull*, (forthcoming).

that the ship had carried the emblems of Stuart monarchy, harking back perhaps to a time when the Covenanter Argyll had been at least a nominal adherent of the king. It would be appropriate for such a magnate to operate a private warship on his monarch's behalf, and the Marquis had placed the crown on Charles II's head at his Scottish coronation in 1651. At any event the *Swan* appears to have been a specialised vessel designed to project naval power on Scotland's western seaboard, and as such she stands at the interface between the old Lordship and the shape of things to come.



ILLUS. 7.8 *Reconstruction of a small warship based on the excavation of a wreck off Duart Point, Mull. It is probably that of the Swan, on record as belonging to the marquis of Argyll in 1644 and lost while in Commonwealth service in 1653.*

DRAWING: COLIN MARTIN

West Highland Heraldry and The Lordship of the Isles

Alastair Campbell of Airds

Few people would claim that Heraldry is conclusive historical evidence. But if it does not always prove who people actually are, it may well show who they thought they were or most of all, who they would like to be! And whatever critics may say, heraldry is intensely symbolic and allows its users to make statements which can be clearly recognisable by those who understand a little of the language.

A particular form of heraldry which does not conform to the established rules seems to have evolved in the Western Highlands and Isles as well as in the North Central Highlands which, for purposes of convenience is given the title of 'West Highland Heraldry' – a phrase first coined by the late Mr Roger Pye who was the first to draw attention to the phenomenon. This is characterised by the use of quartered arms and by the repetitive use of a number of highly symbolic charges.

Quartering is usually used in heraldry to denote descent from a heraldic heiress whose arms are quartered with those of her husband – hence such arms as those of the Duke of Argyll (Quarterly, 1st and 4th, gyronny of eight or and sable; 2nd and 3rd, argent, a galley sails furled oars in action sable flagged gules) where the Campbell gyronny of eight is quartered with the Galley of Lorn which came into the family with the marriage of the Earl of Argyll with the heiress of the Lordship of Lorn; the fact that a financial deal was involved does not alter the fact that the lady concerned was an heraldic heiress. This is normal heraldic practice.

But it is common to find in the arms of the chiefs of West Highland clans the use of quarters where no marriage with heraldic heiresses appears to be involved and where, apart from the use of such obvious symbolic charges as rocks, towers and castles, repeated use is made of four objects; – the Lion rampant, the Galley, the Red Hand (either on its own or clutching an object, notably a cross crosslet fitchy) and the Salmon. Usually these are separate quarterings but on occasion, so much are they apparently desired that two charges may be crammed into the same quarter in order to accommodate them. This form of coat appears in the arms of the Chiefs of such clans as the Clan Donald, the Macleans of Duart, the MacLaines of Lochbuie, the MacLachlans, the MacDougalls, the MacNeills of Barra and of Taynish and the MacKinnons and it is repeated with due differences in the arms of their cadets.

Not all West Highland clan Chiefs follow the same pattern. Notable exceptions include the Campbells whose use of the galley quartering follows normal heraldic practice, the Lamonts (azure, a lion rampant argent) the Mathesons (gyronny of eight, sable and gules, a lion rampant or armed and langued azure) and the MacLeods of the Lewes (or, a burning mountain proper) and of Dunvegan (quarterly, 1st and 4th, azure, a triple towered castle argent masoned sable, windows and porch gules; 2nd and 3rd, gules, three legs armed, conjoined and flexed at the knees argent) the Camerons of Locheil (gules, three bars or), and the Mackenzies (azure, a stag's head cabossed or).

The same repetition of the four charges is also to be found among the chiefs of the Clan Chattan Confederation who also claim a West Highland background. They, too, make frequent use of the same symbols which clearly are of considerable significance and among those displaying two or more on their shields are the Chiefs of the Mackintoshes (quarterly, 1st, or, a lion rampant gules; 2nd, argent, a dexter hand couped fesswise, grasping a man's heart proper; 3rd, azure, a boar's head couped or; 4th, or, a lymphad azure, oars erect in saltire gules); the MacBeans (quarterly, 1st, or, a lion rampant gules; 2nd, argent, a dexter hand appaume gules; 3rd, argent, a sword in pale proper within a border indented gules; 4th, or, a galley with sails furled sable); the Macphersons (party per fess or and azure, a lymphad of the first flagged gules, sails furled, oars in action proper, in the dexter chief point a hand couped fesswise grasping a dagger palewise gules, and in the sinister a cross crosslet fitchy gules); the Shaws (quarterly, 1st, or, a lion rampant gules, armed and langued azure; 2nd, argent, a fir tree growing out of a mound in base seeded proper; in the dexter canton a dexter hand couped at the wrist holding a dagger point downwards gules; 3rd, chequy argent and azure and on a chief of the second; three mullets of the first; 4th, or, a galley, sailed furled azure, flagged and oars in saltire gules); the MacGillivrays (quarterly, 1st, or, a cat-a-mountain sejant guardant proper; 2nd, argent a dexter hand couped at the wrist appaume gules; 3rd, azure, a salmon naiant argent; 4th, or, a galley azure flagged and oars in saltire gules); and the MacThomases (quarterly, 1st, or, a lion rampant gules, armed and langued azure; 2nd, argent, a dexter hand fesswise couped at the wrist holding a dagger point downwards gules; 3rd, or, a lymphad azure, sails furled proper, flagged and oars in saltire gules; 4th, or, a lion rampant gules, armed and langued azure, surmounted of a chevron sable; the whole within a border compy gules and argent, the latter charged of a heart gules).

If this usage does not denote marriages with specific heraldic heiresses, than can it have a more general totemic meaning, of descent in general rather than specific terms, perhaps? Or, with the prevalence of such arms in the Western Isles, can it denote a particular connection with the dominant power

in the area, the Lordship of the Isles, perhaps through membership of the Council of the Isles, if not a specific connection by blood?

In trying to build up a view of what all this might mean, the enquirer is constrained by the paucity and irregularity of evidence and by the fact that the Heralds' Rolls sometimes depict what they think ought to be there or what has been there, rather than that which is actually there at the time, while tombstone carvers sometimes use both their imagination as well as a varying degree of skill. Probably the best evidence consists of seals which are contemporary and whose ownership is shown by the name round their rim. In general, however, the use of seals was confined to those who had a use for them. Their number is scant and evidence of what heraldry was actually in use in the West Highlands and Isles does not become general until quite late on. The Heralds' Rolls are reticent on the subject of this part of the world and it is not until 1672 that a specific attempt was made by Lyon Office to regularise the situation and to record all arms that then existed. The carrying of shields by the recumbent figures on West Highland tombstones is relatively rare although there are three examples at Iona; the shields concerned are decorated although not altogether in the clearest style – two appear each to bear a lion and a galley while the third has a wyvern and a tower.

A convenient starting point is the heraldry of the Lords of the Isles themselves. This can be divided into various stages. The first can take us all the way down to Donald of Harlaw in the early fifteenth century. Prior to his time it appears that the Lords of the Isles used the Galley on its own as a heraldic device. It is shown in various slightly differing ways – with men in the ship, sometimes of one number or another, or sometimes without them, at various times with a cross, a flag or a beacon at the masthead, with oars in action or crossed in saltire out of the water, with sails furled or unfurled, on waves of the sea or by itself but in whatever form, it is still the Galley. From the fact that it was used both by Somerled's senior descendants by birth, the later MacDougall lords of Lorn, and it is said, by Reginald, progenitor of both the MacDonalds and the MacRuairis, it was pretty clearly taken to be symbolic of Somerled even if the claim that he himself used it is open to doubt.

But the Galley's symbolism goes even further. It was used as the early seal of the Isle of Man and, with its sails unfurled, by the later Earls of Caithness which suggests a common descent for it from the old Norse Kingdom of Man and the Isles which Somerled strove to supplant. It is on record as being used by Ranald, King of Man 1187–1226. Sir Iain Moncreiffe of that Ilk claimed that it was a symbol of the old Norse Royal line and that its origins could be discerned in the crescent-moon shaped galley, symbol of the old, pagan Earth-Goddess Nerthus, from whose male embodiment descended the old sacral Peace Kings of

Uppsala. Whatever its origins, its use was obviously of importance for it to be displayed by both the main lines of Somerled's descendants, if not by Somerled himself. It appears on the seals of Angus Mor in 1292 and of Alexander of the Isles in 1300. In itself, it is clearly a considerable 'political statement'. The Lords of the Isles were clearly aware of the use of heraldry as political symbolism.

The next stage comes with Donald of Harlaw and his marriage to Mariota Leslie through whom he laid claim to the earldom of Ross. This claim was not accepted at first which, it is said, led to the famous battle of Harlaw in 1411. Donald had already added to the galley with the royal tressure around it – a reference to his mother Margaret Stewart, daughter of King Robert II – and the eagle with outstretched wings superimposed on it (a galley surmounted of an eagle displayed, within a tressure flory; Seal, 1410). This bird features frequently in Clan Donald heraldry – either as a single supporter behind the shield or with the galley. I do not propose to attempt to speculate on its origins and meaning here; this is another subject of considerable interest.

But Donald's son and successor Alexander makes no bones about the inclusion of the earldom of Ross in his arms, incorporating the three lions rampant of Ross either on their own with the galley (quarterly, 1st and 4th, a lymphad under sail with one man in it; 2nd and 3rd, three lions rampant; seal nd.) or quartered with the galley and the Comyn garbs or wheatsheaves (for the half of the Comyn earldom of Buchan inherited by his maternal great-grandfather William, earl of Ross) and the Leslie buckles of his maternal grandfather Sir Walter Leslie. (Quarterly, 1st, a lymphad surmounted of an eagle displayed; 2nd, three lions rampant; 3rd, three garbs; 4th, on a bend cotised with six crosses couped, three buckles; all within a double tressure flory counter flory; seal, 1440.)

John, the final Lord of the Isles, was also keen on the use of the Royal Tressure. Indeed, if the *Armorial de Gelre* of around 1450 is correct in its depiction of the arms apparently used by him, then he was becoming distinctly tactless (or, three lions rampant within a double tressure flory counter flory gules). His earliest recorded seal and those following are more conventional (a] quarterly, 1st and 4th, a lymphad under sail; 2nd and 3rd, three lions rampant; seal 1449. b] quarterly, 1st and 4th, three lions rampant; 2nd and 3rd, a lymphad under sail, all within a double tressure flory counter flory; seal, 1454, 1464), but it may be noted that on his seal of 1472 he displays as a quartering a hand holding a dagger – whether this is an early appearance of the Red Hand or not it is impossible to tell. (Quarterly, 1st, three lions rampant; 2nd, a lymphad under sail; 3rd, an eagle; 4th, a dexter hand issuing from the base holding a sword in bend sinister; seal, 1472). After his resignation of the earldom of Ross it appears he reverted to the arms of the Isles alone (a lymphad surmounted of an eagle displayed within a double tressure flory counter flory; seal, 1476).

But a new fashion in Clan Donald heraldry appears about the same time; John's younger brother was Celestine, lord of Lochalsh. His coat, used in a seal of 1461 quarters the Galley with the lion rampant (quarterly, 1st and 4th, a galley, sail unfurled; 2nd and 3rd, a lion rampant; seal, no date) while his son, Sir Alexander of Lochalsh, has quarterly 1st and 4th, a galley; 2nd, a lion rampant, and 3rd, a dexter hand appaume on his seal of 1492. With so little evidence to go on, it is difficult to do more than speculate but it is perhaps worth commenting that this appears to be the first appearance of three of the four symbols under discussion in one coat-of-arms and that the line of Lochalsh was in strong contention for leadership of the Lordship.

Prior to the forfeiture of the Lordship, the line of the Lords themselves and that of Lochalsh appear to be the only ones using seals; after it, seals appear for the various branch chiefs with use being made not only of the three charges already mentioned, but of the salmon as well. Of them, more anon, but it should be noted that in 1563 James MacDonald of Dunivaig sealed with 'a shield with an open right hand in pale holding a cross in pale'.¹

It is now time to turn to other users of this form of heraldry to see if there is any discernible common link. The senior line of Somerled, now represented by the MacDougalls of MacDougall, were formerly Lords of Lorn with extensive territory in mainland Argyll and with the islands of Mull, Coll, Tiree and part of Jura. Their power during early generations had at least equalled and indeed surpassed that of the MacDonald line which later emerged as rulers of the Lordship. Having steered a course through the rough waters engendered by Håkon's invasion of 1263, they came badly unstuck through their support of the foes of Robert the Bruce. They then lost the Lordship of Lorn which passed first of all to the Stewarts and then to the Campbells by which time they had been left but with a shadow of their former power.

Initially, they used the undifferenced galley. Alexander of Argyll's seal of 1296 displays a galley with a cruciform masthead which is repeated in slightly different form in his seal of 1300–7. In 1332, the Balliol Roll gives the tinctures of the arms of the 'Sr dargael' as or, a galley sable. By 1565, the arms in use were apparently the same with the addition of the red hand (or, a galley sable with masthead beacon gules, in dexter chief a hand appaume of the last; Workman's MS) these arms being repeated in Hector le Breton's Armorial of 1582.

The Dunvegan Armorial of 1582, however, records a completely different coat (azure a lion rampant, in chief three mullets argent) with the lion rampant appearing again on the 1737 tombstone in Kilbride, now the burial-place of the MacDougall chiefs, of Iain Ciar MacDougall of MacDougall along

1 CDS, ii, 7.

with the other by now familiar charges (quarterly, 1st, a lion rampant; 2nd, a triple-towered castle; 3rd, a galley above a salmon in base; 4th, a hand holding a cross crosslet fitchy) the same arms also appearing there on the 1759 tombstone of MacDougall of Ballichun. Another slab from the same location reveals that by 1785 the MacDougall chief was displaying the arms now confirmed to his successors by Lord Lyon (quarterly, 1st and 4th, azure, a lion rampant argent; 2nd and 3rd, or, a galley sails furled sable, surmounted of a beacon gules).

But if the MacDougalls come from the same stock as their cousins of the Clan Donald, then the Macleans certainly do not. They were, however, members of the Council of the Isles, on which both the Chiefs of Duart and of Lochbuie sat. The earliest coat on record appears to be that on a Lochbuie seal of 1534 which displays a tower argent. Lindsay of the Mount's *Armorial* of 1542 shows the same design for Duart's arms and gives the tinctures, azure a tower argent. Hector Maclean of Duart's seal of four years later is of particular interest since its main charge is a shield with the Campbell gyronny of eight on it. This is a clear reference to the bond of manrent recently signed by Hector and the Earl of Argyll and a political statement of some significance which deserves further study. Around it are grouped a tower, a hand, the Galley and the two eagles' heads which later appear on Duart's arms – a possible reference to the fact that on several occasions they appear to have supplied the King with hawks from the Isles, while Lochbuie's later recorded arms are nothing if not politically correct, displaying as they do all four charges as well as his castle of Moy (quarterly, 1st, argent, a lion rampant gules; 2nd, azure, a tower argent; 3rd, or, a dexter hand in fess gules holding a cross crosslet fitchy azure; 4th, or, a lymphad proper, in base vert, a salmon naiant also proper.)

Membership of the Council would certainly also qualify the MacLeods. The earliest known heraldic device of their chief is the seal of MacLeod of Dunvegan in 1542 (a stag's head, a base chequy). The stag's head may be the same as that displayed by the Mackenzie chiefs who do not ever appear to have used any other charge but the Stewart-like chequer in base is a mystery. In 1582 Sir David Lindsay of the Mount, younger, shows the chiefs of Dunvegan displaying a simple blue coat with a triple-towered silver castle on it. This coat was confirmed to them by Lyon in 1726

But in the seventeenth century, in various locations they are also found to be making use of the Hand, the Galley and the Lion. Sir Rory Mor Macleod's communion cup at Duirinish dating from around 1650 displays quarterly, 1st, a lion rampant; 2nd, a stag's head; 3rd, a triple-towered castle; 4th, a galley. These quarters albeit in different order also appear on a gourd at Dunvegan, while his tombstone of 1664 displays a galley flanked to dexter by a hand and to sinister

by a castle. But the present day arms of MacLeod of MacLeod are, as we have already seen, quarterly, 1st and 4th, azure, a triple-towered castle argent, masoned sable, with windows and porch gules; 2nd and 3rd, gules, three legs armed, conjoined and flexed at the knee argent, concealing their former use of three of the prevailing symbols.

The arms of the Macleods of the Lewes are entirely different (Or, a burning mountain proper). I am indebted to David Sellar for the entirely probable suggestion that since the earliest lands of substance that came to the Macleods of Lewes were through marriage with the Nicolson heiress, she may have brought the arms as well as the lands with her. The arms may well refer to the duty allegedly laid on the Nicolson by the Norse rulers of the isles as coastwatchers. This would also fit with recent confusion over the status of Nicolson of Scorrybreac as a Chief since his later arms are heraldically inferior to those of Nicholson of that Ilk, Lord Carnock, whose connection with the Hebridean Nicolson, if it exists at all, has yet to be established, but who, as holder of the chiefly arms, was proclaimed by Lyon as Chief of the Nicolson; an imbroglio now happily resolved by Lyon's recognition of Scorrybreac as the Highland Chief MacNeacail of MacNeacail and Scorrybreac.

A similar claim could be made by both the MacNeil chiefs who were members of the Council but whose descent – whatever it was – was not that of the Lords of the Isles. MacNeil of Barra makes quite plain his view of the provenance of the Red Hand, surrounding it with nine fetterlocks in clear reference to the O'Neil eponym, Niall of the Nine Hostages, perhaps an underlining thought desirable in view of their somewhat mysterious and unrecorded origins since the MacNeils do not appear among the genealogies in MS 1467 (quarterly, 1st, vert, a lion rampant or; 2nd, argent, a triple-towered castle rising from the sea proper; 3rd, or, a galley, sails furled oars in action sable; 4th, or, a dexter hand appaume surrounded by nine fetterlocks gules; Lyon Office 1805). McNeill of Gigha, meanwhile, displays quarterly 1st and 4th, azure, a lion rampant argent; 2nd, argent, a sinister hand fesswise in chief gules, in base wavy azure a salmon naiant argent; 3rd, or, a galley sails furled oars in saltire sable flagged gules, on a chief gules three mullets or, which arms first appeared on record in Lyon Register between 1672 and 1675.

Although the arms (gules, three bars or) of Cameron of Locheil are well known – in fact the first grant from Lyon in 1795 was of two bars only – it is perhaps not surprising that in view of their probable attendance at the Council, although they are not listed as such, to find that in 1678 Locheil was using a seal of which there is an example at Inveraray. The arms, as well as the barred quartering, include the Galley, the Hand and the Lion, (quarterly, 1st, a galley; 2nd, a hand appaume; 3rd, barry of six; 4th, a lion rampant).

And then there is the Clan Chattan confederation. Mackintosh himself was an early user of the typical quartered coat. Duncan, 11th of Mackintosh, sealed in 1467 and again in 1490, used arms displaying quarterly 1st and 4th, a lion rampant contourne, 2nd and 3rd, a lymphad. Farquhar, the 12th Mackintosh merely turned the lions round the usual way and otherwise used the same arms in 1505 while William of Dunachton, later 13th Mackintosh, in the same year, used quarterly 1st, three boars' heads erased; 2nd, a lion passant [almost certainly a badly drawn lion rampant]; 3rd, a lymphad; 4th, a pine [?] branch in bend sinister. In 1543, William, the 15th Mackintosh used quarterly, 1st, a lion rampant; 2nd, a sinister hand appaume; 3rd, a boar's head couped; 4th a lymphad. It is round 1680 that we first find the arms as used by Mackintosh of Mackintosh today, which are, as already mentioned above, quarterly, 1st, or, a lion rampant gules; 2nd, argent, a dexter hand couped fesswise, grasping a man's heart proper; 3rd, azure, a boar's head couped or; 4th, or, a lymphad azure, oars erect in saltire gules. Two other examples of a single charge being replaced by an increased number are the arms of MacPherson and of MacGillivray, MacPherson in 1534 sealing with a lion rampant and MacGillivray in 1549 with a stag's head couped. This usage by Clan Chattan has two possible West Highland origins; one a claimed descent from Gillechattan Mor of the tribe of Loarn and the other probable membership of the Council of the Isles whose make-up was pretty clearly not confined to those who are listed in the commonly quoted accounts. Malcolm, Captain of Clan Chattan, was given a charter of the office of his bailie or steward of all the lands of the lordship of Lochaber by Alexander Lord of the Isles in 1447 and as such, if for no other reason, would surely qualify.

Incidentally, the heraldic practice of granting Clan Chattan arms with a blue galley on gold or, reversed out, a gold galley on blue, stems, I believe, from the lack of permanence in many early pigments and the difficulty of mixing a convincing and permanent black. There seem to be several instances of arms being described as blue when in fact it is clear that it is merely a broken up attempt at black that is involved. But the convention is now clearly established.

The MacLachlans do not seem to fit into either category described above – of common descent from Somerled or membership of the Council – being supposedly descended from Anrothan, a prince of the O'Neills who is claimed to have married into the Dalriadic dynasty of Cowal and Knapdale. They do not appear at any period to have been members of the Council of the Isles. The MacLachlan chiefs display all four symbols (quarterly, 1st, or, a lion rampant gules; 2nd, argent, a dexter hand couped in fess holding a cross pattee in pale gules; 3rd, or, a galley sails furled oars in saltire sable on a sea proper; 4th,

argent, in base the sea undy proper, a salmon naiiant proper). Their cousins, the Lamonts, display the lion rampant alone (azure, a lion rampant argent) but use the hand as a crest above the helmet.

Finally, we have the Irish dimension. This is not as clear as one would like since the provenance of Irish arms is not written up in nearly the same detail nor is it available as is the case elsewhere. It does, however, appear that the use of these four symbols is far from uncommon in Irish heraldry although the charges instead of being shown as quarters as in Scotland are usually marshalled along with the other charges on the undivided shield. It is not possible to date them.

All the examples which follow are of cadets of the mighty family of O'Neill with, of particular interest, the arms of the O'Donnell, Chief of the Kindred of St Columba, representer of St Columba's actual family, whose hand is holding a cross although of rather different appearance to the form used in Scotland (or, an arm issuant from sinister vested azure cuffed argent holding in its hand proper a passion cross gules). They include; O'Neill; argent, two lions rampant combatant supporting a dexter hand appaume gules, in chief three estoiles of the last, in base waves of the sea therein a salmon naiiant proper. O'Donnell; argent, two lions rampant combatant supporting a dexter hand coupéd appaume gules, in base the sea therein a salmon naiiant proper. Cahan; quarterly, 1st, a lion rampant; 2nd, a garb; 3rd, a salmon naiiant; 4th, a galley. O'Melaghlin/MacLoughlin; per fess in chief divided per pale, dexter, argent, three dexter hands coupéd at the wrist gules; sinister, argent a lion rampant gules armed and langued azure; the base wavy argent and azure, a salmon naiiant proper. MacKeown; argent, two lions rampant combatant supporting a dexter hand appaume gules between, in chief, four mullets of eight points gules and in base the waves of the sea therein a salmon naiiant proper. MacHugh; argent, a saltire vert between a dexter hand in chief gules, two trefoils slipped vert, and a boat with oars proper in base. O'Flaherty; argent, two lions rampant combatant supporting a dexter hand appaume gules, in base a boat with oars sable. There are many more.

Unlike the Scottish system where arms belong to one person at one time only, the right to arms in Ireland appears to be more diffuse and the arms to be those of a family or a name. The Scottish system seems to be tied in with the feudal system of inheritance by the eldest son which replaced the older Gaelic system of tanistry – selection of a successor from those of the blood. This latter system would make the passing of arms by an individual to his immediate descendants impossible and, since it was only in 1541 that Henry VIII officially abolished the old Irish chiefdoms substituting the English feudal system, and since earlier examples of the use of arms by the old Irish families

are few and far between, it would seem that these examples of Irish arms are relatively modern in origin. This is not to say, of course, that their symbolism may not be immeasurably more ancient.

What may the four charges have symbolised? Heraldry is thought to have evolved in Europe around the middle of the twelfth century. It clearly met a need and its use spread rapidly even to distant Scotland. There are some that think this date is too late, and there is certainly no doubt that symbolism and the use of symbols are as old as Man himself. It should also be remembered that armory can make allusions to people or institutions long departed. It is therefore perfectly possible that these symbols may long have been in use before the arrival of heraldry in its modern form; it is equally quite possible that they are a later allusion to very early ideas or people who also predate the arrival of the heraldic system as we know it.

The Galley. As we have already seen, this symbol would seem to have connotations with Scandinavian royalty. It appears to have been used both by the kingdom of Man and the Isles as evinced by its use by the later Isle of Man and by the immediate descendants of Somerled, as well as, in slightly different form, by the Earls of Orkney. It is perhaps worth commenting that it is much less prevalent than the other charges amongst the Irish heraldry of the O'Neills and that it does not appear on the arms of the O'Neill himself.

The Lion Rampant. There seems little doubt that this represents the royal line of the kingdom of Dalriada. It appears frequently on the east coast of Scotland, possibly accounted for by Kenneth MacAlpin being accompanied by many cadets of the line when he left Argyll in 843, who then married into the various Pictish dynasties. This was commemorated by later descendants who displayed the charge, among them being, probably, such families as Wemyss, Dunbar, Abernethy, Home and Moncreiffe. With the addition of the distinctive double tressure flory counter-flory, the lion rampant of course also became the Scottish royal arms.

The Red Hand. Best known today as The Red Hand of Ulster, this is the ancient heraldic device of the O'Neills, once High-Kings of Ireland, who traced their descent from Neil of the Nine Hostages. As we have seen, the hand appears sometimes on its own, or, when referring to St. Columba's branch of the family, holding a cross which sometimes is changed to a heart or a weapon.

The Salmon. The origin of the use of the salmon remains a total mystery. It clearly ranks alongside the other charges in terms of importance; on occasion doubling up with another charge in a single quarter to make sure it is included. It would appear that the other three charges refer to royal dynasties or kingdoms; could this apply to the salmon as well and if so, which royal line is being indicated? The salmon appears frequently in early Celtic mythology as a

symbol of Knowledge in various forms, appearing in many a folk tale. It was a fish of considerable symbolic importance; a conquering Irish king would always make a ritual of slaying the fish in his rival's fish pond and even today, the salmon is a Royal Fish and all fishing rights if not specifically granted elsewhere belong to the Crown.

If the hand and the Cross are references to St Columba could this, too, be the early Christian secret symbol of the Fish? Or does it refer to the Old Knowledge which managed to survive with Christianity superimposed on it for so long? Whatever it is, it was obviously a device of strong significance among the Gaels, a significance which has emerged in relatively recent times. So, for instance, although it does not appear in his arms at all, the Campbell chief displays the salmon on his standard and also as buttons on his evening dress jacket, this last a privilege confined to the Chief's immediate family and those families in the entail. And, intriguingly, as Professor Per Andraesson has pointed out, that although the salmon does not often appear in Scandinavian heraldry it does so on a South Jutland coin of the eighth century – along with a galley.

In conclusion, it appears that in West Highland heraldry we have a widespread usage which does not conform to the normal rules. This takes the form of repeated use as quarterings of four charges, the Galley, the Lion rampant, the Hand and the Salmon. This is not confined to those of the blood of Somerled, nor does it appear to denote membership of the Council of the Isles. The same combination of heraldic charges is to be found in Ireland, notably in the arms of branches of the O'Neill family. The earliest example found of this practice seems to occur first with the lords of Lochalsh in the late fifteenth century. It seems to become widespread among many West Highland clans and also in the Clan Chattan federation from the sixteenth century onwards, replacing the earlier use of a much simpler coat with a single charge. The lords of Lochalsh were claimants for leadership of the Lordship even before the forfeiture of 1493 and the practice of using these arms seems to become prevalent after the ending of the direct line of the Lordship in 1545. The early use of the four charges might also coincide with the most active part played in the affairs of Ireland by the West Highland and Island clans of this period. This leaves us with some questions. Is a political statement being made with the adoption of this distinctive form of heraldry, and if so, what is it? Is it a reaction to the forfeiture of the Lordship of the Isles in 1541 or to King Henry VIII's attempt to stamp out the old Gaelic system in Ireland in 1541? And what precisely is the symbolism behind the use of the mysterious salmon?

Organising a Lordship

The Castles of the MacDonalds of Dunivaig and the Glens

T.E. McNeill

This paper is concerned with the organisation and structures (literally and metaphorically) of power in the Gaelic world of western Scotland and Ulster. On both sides of the North Channel were comparable systems of Gaelic lordship, which enjoyed a time when the hostile forces of the Scottish Kings and the English Kings from Dublin were weak and the pressure they had applied in the thirteenth century slackened from the middle of the fourteenth to the end of the fifteenth centuries. In the Hebrides and the western coast of Scotland, the Lordship of the Isles dominated Gaelic Scotland with a number of lordships directly subordinate to them, like the Campbells, Macleods and Macleans, and junior branches of the MacDonald lineage. Historians have tended to take these men for granted, if for no other reason than the sources about them are scarce, at least until they challenge the power of their overlords. In Ulster, the O'Neill lordship of Tir Eoghain had aspirations, but never the ability, to wield such power as the Lords of the Isles. They wished to reduce such lordships as the Maguires, MacSweeneys, O'Cahans or O'Neills of Clancadoy to a second tier of power. While the only other one capable of a direct challenge to Tir Eoghain was Tir Connaill under the O'Donnells, others could combine to resist O'Neill claims successfully. Indeed, they would form the core of the counties when the English government imposed them: O'Cahans (Londonderry) Maguires (Fermanagh) or McMahons (Monaghan).

One of the key instruments of medieval control of land was the castle, and we have built up over the years some expertise at judging the purposes and priorities of castles. The days of seeing castles as simple military structures are long gone; now they are studied from the point of view that they encapsulate both how the lord wished his power to be seen and as providing, through the priorities of its buildings, an insight into the way he wished his power to work. Their very existence marked a change in Gaelic ways of expressing power, not least because they provide a fixed centre in the landscape, whose control may be taken as proof of control of the wider lordship. As such, their construction is a significant step, which the Gaelic lords of Argyll had taken by the early thirteenth century, away from the early medieval kingship with its grand but vague claims, to the more structured lordship of the later Middle Ages. Castle halls and chambers functioned to articulate a hierarchical social and administrative centre for the lord, not just a military stronghold.

It is noteworthy that the chief places of the Lordship of the Isles were neither fortified nor had many of the trappings of a castle. Their main feature was a great hall, set on an island in an inland lake on Islay in the case of Finlaggan: Aros and Ardtornish, which share prominent positions on either side of the Sound of Mull, highly visible from a vessel sailing from east to west, both featured first-floor halls built of stone with other buildings around.¹ The same applies to the O'Neills in Tir Eoghain. Their main centre appears to have been at Dungannon, although their crowning place was at Tullahogue. In the Annals, Dungannon is described as O'Neill's house, not castle; Tullahogue is an anomalous rath. By contrast, Harry Avery's is a castle built by an O'Neill, but of a lesser and fractious section of the dynasty, placed in a frontier zone: it is the exception which proves the rule. This contrasts with the situation in the secondary lordships. Here, both in Ireland and in the Islands, castles are found at the key places in the lordships. They are well-appointed, in accordance with European standards of accommodation. For example, we have Kisimul Castle, the castle of the McNeills on Barra in the Outer Hebrides, set on a small island in the sheltered harbour. On one side of the courtyard are the key public elements of hall and chapel. Each end of the hall is marked out on the outer side by a buttress; it faces out to the east where the main channel runs, used by the modern ferries, yachts and fishing boats. On the west side of the courtyard is the lord's private chamber on the first floor of a tower, reached by a narrow stair, to restrict access; a further stair allows the lord and his guests to reach the roof and its views of the harbour and the land around.² Even in the further part of the Lordship of the Isles, which might be deemed isolated by land-locked scholars and where geology precludes good masonry, the key elements of a castle are deployed to emphasise the status of the lord.

The study of the secondary lordships, either individually or as a group, brings us to the nuts and bolts of power of the Gaelic political systems. This paper is concerned with one of these subordinate lordships, that of the men descended from John Mor of Islay, younger son of John of Islay, Lord of the Isles, whose lordship is described as that of Clann Ian Mor, after its founder, or of Clan Donald South, from its geographical position. The lands of the lordship were principally the island of Islay and Kintyre on the mainland; the southern edge of the main Lordship of the Isles. Jura was associated with it, while Gigha (McNeills) and Colonsay (MacDuffies) were subordinate lordships of it. John

1 RCAHMS *Argyll*, volume 3, 1980, 172–3, 174–177.

2 T.E. McNeill, The view from the top, in D. Sarlet (ed.), *Les cahiers de l'urbanisme; Mélanges d'archéologie médiévale, liber amicorum en hommage à André Matthys* (Liège, 2006), 122–127.

Mor married Margaret (or Margery) Bisset, whose family had controlled the north-eastern quarter of the present Co. Antrim since the early thirteenth century. It is usually stated that this marriage brought the whole of the Bisset lordship into John's hands, but there are grounds for believing that it was more likely only a share that came to him, with surviving Bisset lords controlling Glenarm and the lands to the south of it.³ This said, it is notable that John Mor's descendants for the next three generations married wives from leading Ulster families, implying that their Antrim connections were of real importance to them. As a case-study, this lordship has several advantages: its chiefs occupied a key role in the life of the Lordship of the Isles in general; its lands covered more than one island and it included both Scottish and Irish Gaels.

By the end of the fifteenth century and with the collapse of the Lordship of the Isles, the Scottish lands and power of the clan were coming under pressure. The growth of mainland powers, principally the Campbells, backed by the Scottish Kings, caused them to lose Kintyre; MacLean encroached on Islay. Presumably as a result of this pressure, the Ian Mor MacDonalds looked increasingly to Ulster for power. During the sixteenth century the Ulster lands were usually delegated to a younger member of the family, most notably to the redoubtable Sorley Boy, and they proceeded firstly to absorb any remaining Bisset power, and then to advance along the north coast of Antrim, seizing the lands of the MacQuillans. This shift in power culminated in the person and career of Randal, Sorley's second son. 1603 saw the start of the greatest period of MacDonald power in Ulster. Randal was first of all granted the whole of the Glens and the Route by James VI and I; in 1614–5 he abandoned his cousins of Islay when they rebelled under Sir James McDonald of Dunivaig and then in 1620 he was made the first earl of Antrim. He concentrated on his lands in Antrim and developed them considerably by bringing over English and Lowland Scots tenants, dying a wealthy man in 1637, unlike the great majority of Irish landlords. His son, the 2nd Earl, was set fair for a grand career; brought up in Ulster, France and the Court in London, he married the Duchess of Buckingham, but his world and connections, as a great Gaelic magnate and Stuart courtier, were shattered by the Civil Wars.⁴ He recovered his lands after the Restoration but never his financial solvency. The power of the family was lost along with their use for castles in the later seventeenth century civilised Ireland.

3 H. McDonnell, 'Glenarm friary and the Bissets', *The Glynnns*, 15 (1987), 34–49.

4 H.H. Ohlmeyer, *Civil War and restoration in the three Stuart kingdoms; the career of Randal MacDonnell, Marquis of Antrim, 1609–1683* (Cambridge, 1993).

Their castles fall into the same two phases. First of all there were castles in the lands which the MacDonalds controlled before 1500: Islay (Dunivaig), Kintyre (Skipness, Airds and Dunaverty) and Antrim Robert Bruce's castle on Rathlin Island and perhaps only one of the sites at Castle Carra, Red Bay and Glenarm. We may note a few features of this list alone. Neither Jura nor Gigha have castles: the first is infertile, the second small and both are encompassed by Islay and Kintyre. The small tower of Claig castle lies on a little island off Jura at the southern entrance to the Sound of Islay and the Royal Commission implies that it controlled Jura, but, as we shall see, it probably had a quite different role. All are coastal and set next to harbours or landing places. Skipness is on the east coast of Kintyre, Dunaverty at the south end, the Mull. There is no castle on the west coast of Kintyre because there is no landing place along this shore. There is a coherent strategic pattern to their distribution and the spacing (Illus 9.3). Glenarm to Rathlin; Glenarm to Dunaverty; Rathlin to Dunivaig; Rathlin to Dunaverty; are all distances of about 25 miles by sea, an easy day's sail. Dunaverty and Airds are similar in their sites and form and both surely functioned as staging posts for a boat rounding the Mull of Kintyre. Only Dunivaig to Dunaverty (which also requires rounding the Mull) and Dunaverty to Skipness are about 10 miles more, while Red Bay and Castle Carra are a little



ILLUS. 9.1 *Dunivaig Castle, Islay.*

PHOTO: T.E. MCNEILL

nearer to the others than Glenarm. The importance and knowledge of sea communications and conditions is well illustrated at Rathlin. The island is shaped like an inverted L in plan, with three promontories, to west, east and south, and when the tide runs strongly, especially if it is in opposition to the wind, the sea off each of these can be suddenly and violently rough; the passage between the southern promontory and Fair Head has an area of tidal turbulence known as Slough na Morra. The church site and present centre lie at Church Bay within the crook of the L, convenient for modern communications with Ballycastle on the Antrim coast to the south; a boat going between the two can pass west of the southern promontory and need not approach the other two. Going from Church Bay to the north or east involves setting out to round the promontories, without being able to see the sea conditions from land before embarking. Robert Bruce's castle is set towards the northern end of the east coast. The McDonnell Race, an area of turbulence, runs out several miles east of the north-eastern promontory of the island, when the full tide (ebb or flow) is running. However, boats from the east coast of Antrim or Kintyre, can come in south of the Race and a watcher on Robert Bruce's castle can see clearly the state of the water before setting off. If you judge the tide right, coming up from Red Bay, you can be carried (on the ebb) up the coast to Rathlin, or (with the flow) be helped in the opposite direction; in both cases, the small harbour just south of Robert Bruce's castle lies neatly in the lee, between the MacDonnell Race and Slough na Morra.

There are three potential sites for a McDonald castle in the Glens of Antrim, occupied before 1500. One is Glenarm, certainly a manorial base of the Bissets in the thirteenth century, but probably continuing in their hands through the fifteenth century. Two other sites exist further north along the coast: Red Bay and Castle Carra. We find records of carpenters working at Red Bay for James MacDonald, then lord of the Glens and Dunivaig, in 1561;⁵ James writes to the Constable of Carrickfergus from it in 1563, and it, not Glenarm, was sacked by Shane O'Neill in 1565.⁶ The site, set on a promontory of the low cliff-top overlooking the bay and harbour site, is difficult to interpret. The only certain remains are those of a rough stone curtain wall around an enclosure defined by a ditch and added against a stone building with Scottish-style roll-moulded over-sailing string courses. This may have been built on a motte, itself inserted into an earlier promontory fort; on the other hand the 'motte' may simply be

5 *Calendar of State Papers Relating to Ireland*, volume 1, 1509–73, (London, 1860), 170–171, 205.

6 G. Hill, *An historical account of the MacDonnells of Antrim* (Belfast, 1873: reprinted 1976), 134–136.

the product of the collapse of stone buildings and the existence of the ditch beside it.⁷ The above-ground remains of Castle Carra consist of a small, two-story tower⁸ best interpreted as a chamber tower connected to a timber hall. Excavations at the site have shown that it was occupied by the fourteenth century and the pottery indicates a relatively high status. It appears to have been the site where the MacDonalds first entertained and then killed Shane O'Neill in 1567.⁹ In post-medieval times the tower was used as a 'killeen'.¹⁰ Both sites are at the mouths of glens and besides landing places, protected from the west and north-west winds but exposed to the north-east and east. They are only about five miles apart and it seems unlikely that both were occupied equally and at the same time by the MacDonalds: perhaps Red Bay succeeded Castle Carra.

As well as their maritime siting, there are some other common features. Five are similar in their siting on maritime rock-stacks overlooking small harbours: Dunaverty and Airds in Kintyre, Dunivaig in Islay, Red Bay and Robert Bruce's castle on Rathlin. Skipness and Dunaverty, and also possibly Red Bay and Castle Carra were started before they were occupied by the MacDonalds. Glenarm (if it was a MacDonald castle) has no remains of the period and the remains of Dunaverty and Airds are scant in the extreme.¹¹ The remains of Red Bay and Castle Carra depend too much on speculation to be capable of much meaningful discussion. This leaves us, from the core castles of the 14-fifteenth century lordship, with Skipness, Dunivaig, Robert Bruce's and Claig as subjects for individual analysis.

Skipness lies on the east coast of Kintyre, facing across Kilbrannan Sound to Arran and the mainland, the border between the Lordship of the Isles and the Scottish kingdom.¹² In the thirteenth century it consisted of two separate buildings of stone, presumably with other timber ones, but at some time after 1300 these were incorporated into a rectangular courtyard of stone. This had two smaller latrine towers projecting on the east side and at the north east angle and a larger tower projecting at the south-east angle: the entrance gate was marked by a portcullis and gate but not by an impressive tower. All the walls are pierced at first floor level by windows with wide rear arches covered by segmental, pointed arches; some have loops with cross slits. These, and the lavish provision

7 T.E. McNeill, 'The stone castles of Northern Co. Antrim', *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, 46 (1983), 101–28.

8 McNeill, 'Stone castles of Antrim'.

9 Hill, *MacDonnells of Antrim*, 141–143.

10 D.P. Hurl and E.M. Murphy, 'Life and death in a County Antrim tower house', *Archaeology Ireland*, 10.2 (1996), 20–23.

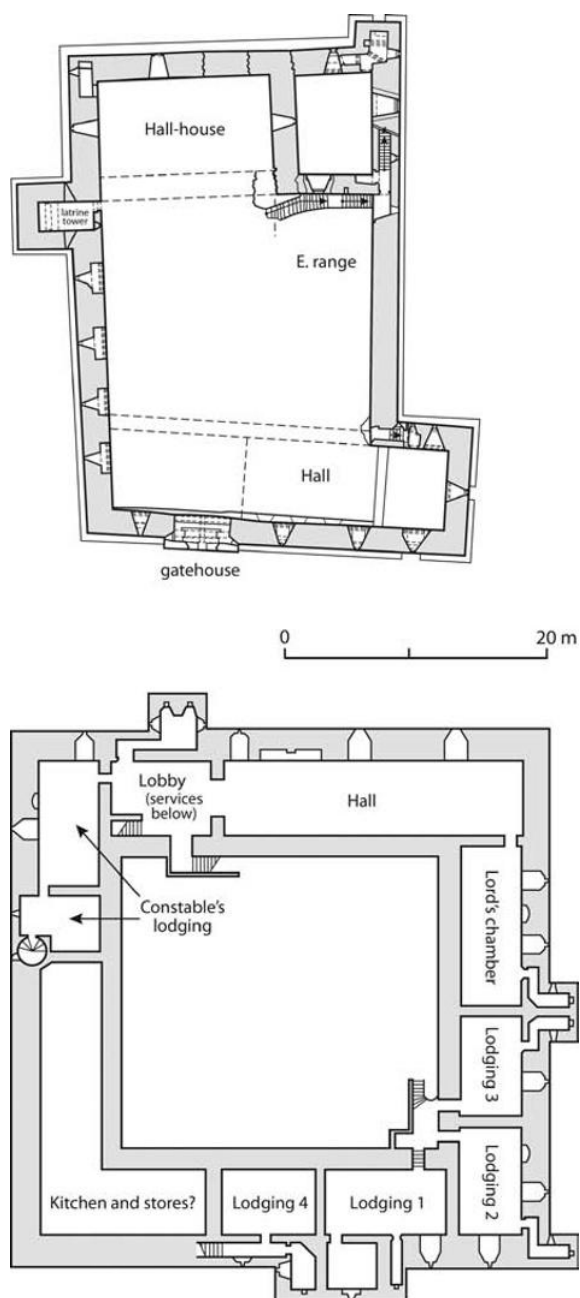
11 RCAHMS, *Argyll* 1, *Kintyre*, 157–159.

12 RCAHMS, *Argyll* 1, *Kintyre*, 165–175.

of latrines, indicate that the courtyard was lined with impressive ranges of lodgings of stone or timber at first-floor level. By contrast defensive features are conspicuous by their absence; no gate tower and only the south-east tower has any provision of flanking loops below battlement level. Its rectangular plan and lodgings ranges recall Maxstoke or Bodiam of the mid and later fourteenth century in England, but the closest parallel to it is Ballymoon in Co. Carlow (Illus 9.2). It has a more regular square plan and is a little larger, but was probably built on a new site, without the need to incorporate older structures. It shares with Skipness the loops with cross slits and the wide segmental arches behind them. It also shares considerable academic confusion over its date and social context: in both there is pressure to date it earlier to put it into 'English' ownership, Stewart for Skipness, Bigod for Ballymoon, but at the price of pushing it earlier than the sophistication of the plan and its parallels would indicate. At Skipness, the McDonalds appear to have built a very grand castle, impressive in its domestic accommodation for a large household and in its confidence to drop its military guard.

At first sight Claig castle is a simple, small tower house.¹³ Its interest lies in its position on the small island of Fraoch Eilean off the island of Jura at the southern end of the Sound of Islay. It has a rocky shoreline with large areas of shallow reefs around it. Although it is only about 250 metres from a landing place on Jura, it can only be accessed by small rowing boats; larger galleys or trading ships could not either reach its shores easily or tie up to them. As a result, its use must have been strictly limited. It was neither centrally placed large enough to serve as the castle for the McDonalds' base on Jura; the added difficulty of communicating over a small ferry would also have made this impracticable. It was clearly constructed to relate, not to Jura but to the Sound of Islay. The island lies at the southern end of the Sound, which is a key route for the Inner Hebrides; its situation must be judged by its relation to navigation through the Sound. At full tide in both directions, the stream runs at a formidable four or five knots through the Sound. North-west of the island there is an extensive reef, the Black Rocks which narrow the navigation channel of the Sound to half its width and make it run against the Islay shore, away from Fraoch Eilean and Jura. On the other hand there is a narrow passage between Fraoch Eilean and Jura which leads to an anchorage NNW of Fraoch Eilean. However, both the anchorage and the passage northwards are to be approached with care; the rocks are very near the surface and extensive while the tidal stream may easily push a boat off course. Traditionally, Claig would have been identified as providing military control of the southern entrance to the Sound, but this belongs to a line of thinking, about castles and military control, which has been abandoned. Claig castle could have mounted

13 RCAHMS, *Argyll 5, Islay, Jura, Colonsay and Oronsay*, 263–264.



ILLUS. 9.2 *Comparative plans of Skipness Castle, Argyll (top) and Ballymoon Castle, Co. Carlow (bottom).*

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no military response to a force of, say, 100 men in three galleys travelling through the Sound. If they came from the north, the garrison could only have seen the boats when they were some two miles away, nearer to identify them as hostile. They would be travelling at 5 knots at least, double that if they timed their approach to catch the full tidal flow; the garrison had less than half an hour to reach and attack them. Even if an equal force could have been in the tower, it would have needed to respond in galleys. These could only have been anchored north of Fraoch Eilean, only *c.*500 metres away, but they would have had to be ferried in small boats to them and then to manoeuvre around the Black rocks to the Islay shore, more than a mile away: the invaders would be well past them. Yet the castle must have been built to have a role in the Sound; it just cannot have been military; instead, it must have been a civil control. To justify the expense of construction and the castle garrison, it must have been to levy tolls, which presupposes both the existence of a fair volume of commercial traffic prepared to pay for passage and an interest in it on the part of the McDonald lords. To bar an attack down the Sound, it is necessary to have a military barrier at both ends, but tolls need only one tollhouse; there is no castle at the north end of the Sound.

Dunivaig was the chief place, of the clan controlling the key island of Islay. The Royal Commission¹⁴ which has published a detailed description of the above ground remains, rather conservatively date the main building to the sixteenth century. We may note some features which relate to its use. It is built on a rock promontory overlooking the narrow, rather awkward entrance to a small, enclosed harbour. High on the end of the rock is a first-floor hall, or large chamber, reached from the main courtyard up a narrow path, guarded by a drawbridge. The courtyard has a landward gate and a wide second gate which gives out to the shore of the harbour: within it are the clear remains of four buildings set at right angles to the curtain wall. The Commission suggests that the width of the seaward gate would have allowed for boats to be drawn up into the castle and that the four buildings might have housed them. The shore is steep to drag a substantial boat up but, more importantly, they record the base of a pillar which would have divided the gate into two and prevented any boat access; the pillar base is now hard to see. The inner buildings have narrow entrances and could never have been used for boat stores. The key to Dunivaig lies outside the curtain wall, on the flat land east of the harbour, served by a second landing place cleared of stones. The castle as defined by the present remains of stone provided an inner, protected space for the lord's great chamber and an inner court with storehouses for his valuables, both accessed from a private landing. McDonald's public life, his hall and the place where he used the contents of his

14 RCAHMS, *Argyll 5, Islay, Jura, Colonsay and Oronsay*, 268–278.

storehouses, surely including wine, would have been seen in buildings, probably of timber erected there, and presumably associated with a township as well, using the second landing place.

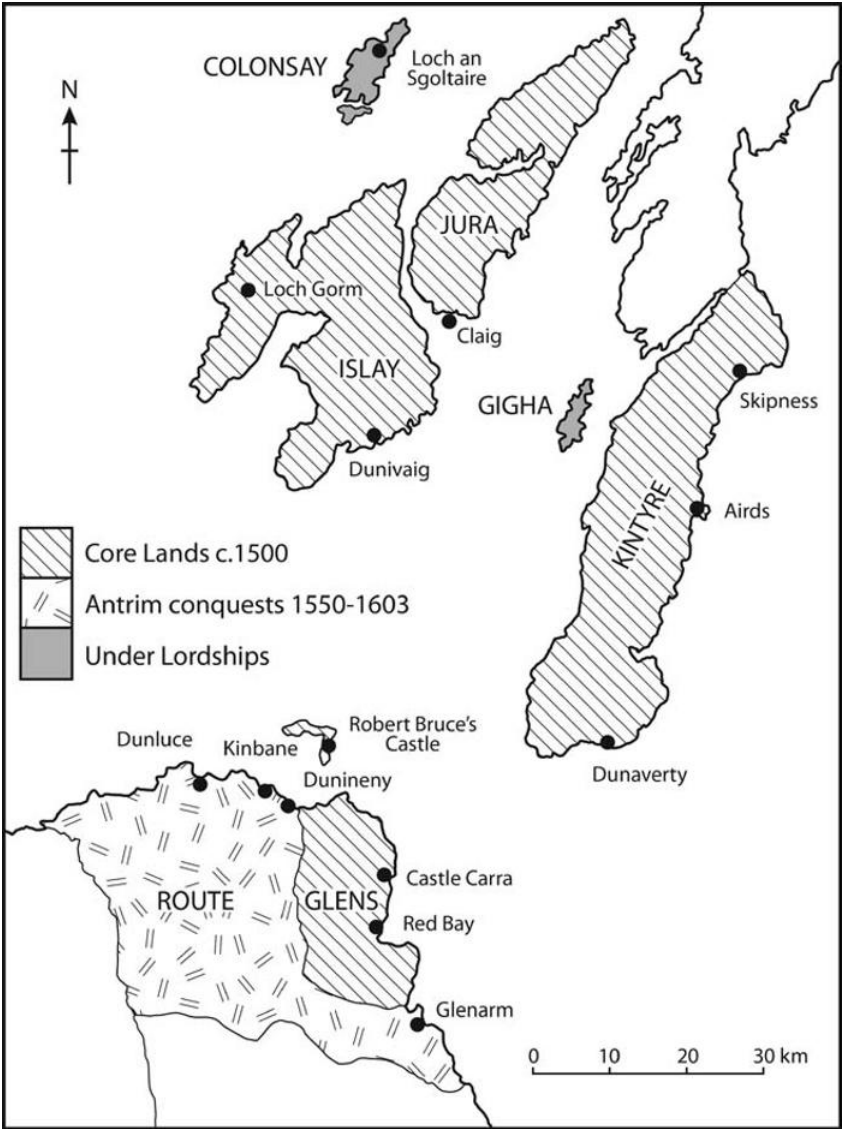
Robert Bruce's castle is in a way an expanded version of Dunivaig. It has an enclosed rock stack, partially detached from the mainland, on which there is a large enclosure, defined by a ditch and towered curtain wall.¹⁵ The rock stack probably accommodated the inner chamber, the outer ward the hall and other buildings. A hint of these occurs in an account of the preparations for the wedding between the widow of James McDonald of Dunivaig and Turlough O'Neill. This took place on Rathlin, presumably at Robert Bruce's castle and in the preceding year we hear of Sorley Boy McDonald having wattles cut in the Glens to build on Rathlin.¹⁶

During the first half of the sixteenth century, McDonald South lords were steadily expanding their lands in Ulster. As well as absorbing Bisset lands, the pushed eastwards along the north coast to seize the MacQuillan lordship of the Route, from Fair Head and Rathlin east to the Bann and south towards present-day Ballymena (Illus 9.3). They carried out the conquest under younger sons of the main line in Dunivaig and Islay and completed it by 1603 when Randal, son of Sorley Boy received a grant of the northern part of Antrim from James VI and I. In 1621 he was created 1st Earl of Antrim. Their power was badly affected by the Civil War after 1641 and they failed to reinstate it fully under the Restoration. Two castles seem to be linked to this military expansion: Dunseverick and Kinbane. The second of these consists of a small enclosure set at the base of a chalk promontory (Kinbane means the White head) from below the main basalt cliff of the coast west of Ballycastle: Dunseverick is set on a rock stack. The 1551 account of Sir James Croft's expedition reports that Kinbane castle, described as recently built by Colla Mac Donald, was taken.¹⁷ Dunseverick appears as Sorley Boy's castle in the account of Shane O'Neill's campaign of 1565. Neither castle figures again until the seventeenth century, when Dunseverick was leased to an O'Cahan. The principal surviving feature of both is a very small tower, each about 3 metres square internally. Other buildings are visible beneath the turf at Dunseverick and possibly at Kinbane. Dunseverick might just be reached by a horse, but Kinbane is set at the bottom of a steep and narrow cliff path. It would be possible to draw up a strong boat below Dunseverick rock, but the beach on one side of Kinbane is boulder-strewn and the rock shelf on the other hard of access except in calm weather. Anyone

15 McNeill, 'Stone castles of Antrim', 104–106.

16 Hill, *McDonnells of Antrim*, 151–152.

17 Hill, *Macdonnells of Antrim*, 49.



ILLUS. 9.3 Map showing growth of the lordship of the MacDonalds of Islay and Antrim and the principal power centres within their territory.
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in either is easily bottled up, so they look less like bolt-holes than bases for raiding into a country already weakened and unlikely to provide strong resistance. Limited excavations at Kinbane produced little material evidence, but the absence of diagnostically seventeenth century artefacts may mean that it had

a limited life span.¹⁸ As military strongholds (or boltholes) these two relate to the castles of Loch Gorm on Islay and Loch an Sgoltaire on Colonsay. These are both set on islands in inland lakes and have similar enclosures enclosed by banks of earth faced with dry stone with circular angle bastions. They are associated with wars and the rebellion of Sir James McDonald of Dunivaig in 1614–5 in particular.¹⁹

The most important castle in north Antrim was Dunluce, another rock stack site. The remains there cover a number of periods and the site has never been properly and systematically described and analysed, let alone dated and interpreted. On the rock stack there are at least three major periods of building. The first consists of two round towers and remains of the curtain wall between them, delimiting a rectangular enclosure on the south half of the stack summit. Hand-guns loops in one of the towers shows that this enclosure cannot pre-date the early sixteenth century. After this a one-story building with a fine, wide entry from the courtyard was erected, with a kitchen against the east curtain. On the south side of the courtyard was remarkable Renaissance loggia, facing north to protect its users from the strength of the Ulster sun. The core of the gatehouse probably also dates from this period. It was succeeded by the building of a large hall and great chamber, of two stories with large, square Jacobean mullioned windows, set in bays on the west side, facing the courtyard. When this was built the earlier single-story building was converted into the services for the hall, placed between it and the kitchen. The gatehouse was heightened and equipped with corner rounds, typical of a Scottish tower house. Probably as part of the same scheme, the mainland was developed. A triangular courtyard was laid out, leading to the bridge which led on to the rock stack. A range of fine lodgings each with brick fireplace ran along its west side. This was embellished with an external gallery overlooking the garden and bowling-green west of the castle. South of this a small town was laid out. We can safely attribute these later developments to Randal, the first Earl, perhaps to celebrate his Earldom. It is difficult to date the loggia and its associated buildings. They may date to 1603–20, before Randal's Earldom²⁰ or they may date to the last decades of the sixteenth century; for the loggia can hardly be much earlier, but these were uncertain decades, dominated by war. In either case both these building periods saw grandiose projects, establishing McDonald claims to English culture and aligning them with the political settlement of Ireland under James I. This should not disguise our problems analysing the

18 C. Breen, *Dunluce Castle: a History and Archaeology* (Dublin, 2012), 66–68.

19 RCAHMS, *Kintyre*, volume 5, 281–283.

20 H. McDonnell: *A history of Dunluce castle* (Belfast, 2004), 61, 66.

castle: in particular we have very little appreciation of the northern, inner courtyard, with no real idea of either its date or how it was used.

Dunluce took its place with two others which were used as residences of the Earl or his family: Glenarm and Ballycastle. Glenarm has gone now and we know virtually nothing of it. The castle of Ballycastle was destroyed in the middle of the nineteenth century but we know something of it from drawings made before its loss. It was quite a small tower house with Scottish corbelled rounds, set beside what became the main square of the town of Ballycastle. Randal's vast estate was divided into four 'Baronies', the Irish sub-division of a County. Two were named after his principal houses or castles which lie within them: Dunluce and Glenarm. This left two other baronies, in each of which are the remains of enigmatic structures known to contemporaries as castles: Dunineny in Cary and Clough in Kilconway. Excavation at Dunineny has shown that it was a sham castle.²¹ It had a gate tower with no back walls, which was flanked by no curtain wall, although there was a ditch and the entrance passage was carefully paved and finished. There were timber-framed buildings within it, but very few artefacts and with bones from the sort of meat which should never be given to a lord to eat. There was no sign that it could function as a military structure, or that it had been the seat of a resident lord, yet it undoubtedly belonged to the earlier seventeenth century and it is mentioned in leases as the centre of an estate, to which the Earl had rights of access and residence. The remains of Clough are both badly preserved and unexcavated, but it, too, is difficult to interpret, with a gate tower of striking irregularity and which appears not to be connected to any curtain wall.²² These two appear to have been built, not as residences but as formal centres for the administration of Cary and Kilconway baronies.

Castles, along with galleys armed men and marriages, were a crucial part of the power of the lords of Clan Donald South. They cost money, for they need professional masons to build them; and they could not be paid in cattle. Some were on old sites, proclaiming the McDonalds as successors of earlier lords. When they extended their power with their sixteenth century colony in Ulster, they built castles as part of the expansion, showing the importance that they attached to them. There were the two display castles: Skipness and Dunluce. Whether John Mor or his father built the courtyard castle at Skipness, he and his descendants maintained it until they lost Kintyre and the castle was converted to a tower and courtyard. It was built to provide the scene for the lord and a distinguished household who could be accommodated in the lodgings around the court. Dunluce saw two periods of display buildings.

21 McNeill, 'Dunineny castle'.

22 McNeill, 'Stone castles of Antrim,' 124.

The first saw the construction of the remarkable Renaissance loggia, accompanying the first phase of what became the buttery in the next period. This saw the castle transformed into a grand showpiece with its great hall and chamber building for formal and public ceremonies on the traditional rock, while the lodgings and gardens on the mainland provided the Earl with private life and pleasure. Both were designed according to ideas of formal display from Europe: rectangular lodgings ranges, loggia and the bay windows of the seventeenth century hall and chamber. While no doubt they did impress the McDonalds' fellow Gaelic lords, they were built with a different audience in mind; on the one hand, the world of the treaty of Westminster/Ardtornish and, on the other, the chief place of one of the richest lords in Jacobean Ireland.

Behind these two frontispieces lay the castles which articulated the framework of the lordship. The galleys and the landing places beside the castles at Dunivaig, Rathlin and Red Bay or Castle Carra linked them together, each serving as places for the lords to stay in the principal parts of the lordship. Dunivaig is the most important, both at the time and for the light it sheds on the lordship. The inner castle provided a private, secure chamber and a row of storehouses as the core of the complex. Beyond it lay the public area, where the wine flowed and the island's surplus (for Islay is well-endowed with good land) was gathered. The castle at Claig played its part here, controlling (and taxing) commercial traffic up the Sound of Islay, along with the Sound of Mull one of the main arteries of the Lordship of the Isles, not just Clan Donald South. This implies a concern with material gain, which is not usually seen as part of the Gaelic lordship. None of these castles is particularly strong in straightforward military terms. They lack gatehouses, towers with flanking loops which are the two basic features of castle defence by the fourteenth century. The two castles that seem to be associated with military campaigns, Kinbane and Dunseverick, have small towers and look more like refuges or places to store valuables. These were followed by the two castles built by Sir James McDonald in 1614–5. They are matched by two castles which appear to be for business and administration, Clough and Dunineny.

The sophisticated understanding of castle use by the MacDonalds gave them a strong organisation and structure to their control of lands. They were not alone in this; most obviously in the way that control of Dunluce acted as the visible sign of the control of the whole northern Route: when Sorley Boy made good his power over it, this formalised his seizure of the Route from MacQuillan who obviously saw the situation in the same terms. Nor were they alone among the lesser lordships of the Gaelic world. Within the Lordship of the Isles, the establishing of the power of Campbells or Macleans was accompanied by the building of castles. In the case of the Campbells this was

followed by the proliferation of castle-building among the lesser lords of the clan, a phenomenon which we cannot in Antrim see until the seventeenth century and the first Earl's tenants. The broader pattern, however, of the lesser lords marking their power during the fifteenth century is one which we can see in Ireland as well as the Lordship of the Isles. The lands of the MacSweeneys, O'Cahans or O'Neills of Clan Aedh Buidhe all saw their lords building castles well distributed across them. The castles of the MacSweeneys too may be seen as a mixture of main centres and military bolt-holes.²³

The main message of such a study is this must be to argue against the sort of portrait of Gaelic lords and lordship often found in histories. This is exemplified by Kingston as: 'For Clann Domnaill in Ulster and the Isles, an aptitude for highly mobile and water-borne lordship had as its corollary a failure to found large-scale settlements worthy of the name of town.... The use of castles was restricted to small scale raid and counter-raid; in war they were often abandoned'.²⁴ The picture (and Kingston simply reflects many other old-fashioned historians) is of a Gaelic world economically undeveloped, crucially in the area of trade and commerce. Instead power is described as crudely military and the system of lordship chaotic; somehow the ships, armour and weapons, of which they write, spontaneously generated themselves. Armour and weapons (particularly guns) and the skills of castle building must have been imported and paid for.

Hopefully the study of castles can correct this picture in two ways. Firstly, the control of land was much more organised and stable than we are sometimes told. The stability gave security to succession above all which could lead to steady expansion of land and power. Secondly this stable power, derived from castles and the social system which accompanied them, was created and wielded by the second rank of lords. Castles gave lords the power to increase their control of land and this opportunity was seized by the under-lords of the Gaelic world in the later Middle Ages in the Isles and in Ulster. Castles were built for the real lordship and the McDonalds' use of castles was sophisticated and specialised: display, administration and war being emphasised in different sites and because of different needs. Above all, the way Dunivaig was designed, with its emphasis on store-rooms and wealth denies it. Clai castle shows a clear appreciation of waterborne traffic, not for war but for trade which could be taxed and which brought in the goods needed for the exercise of lordship and hospitality. Towns were not essential for this. The siting of Mac Sweeney castles in Donegal shows the same appreciation of the importance of trade,

23 M. Ni Loinsigh, 'An assessment of castles and land ownership in late medieval Co. Donegal', *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, 57 (1994), 145–158.

24 S. Kingston, *Ulster and the Isles in the Fifteenth Century* (Dublin, 2004), 20–21.

here fish for imported goods. MacSweeney Doe's castle is sited to take advantage of the highest point of the deep water channel of Sheephaven. In Lough Swilly, MacSweeney Fanad controlled a network of fishing places focused on the sheltered anchorage of Rathmullan and the market place at Ramelton. O'Donnell's castle at Donegal has an out-station at Ballyboyle where a castle of his vassal O'Boyle controlled a landing place at the point where the deep-water channel narrows and becomes difficult to follow. These are all Gaelic lords developing a system of exchange with English or Spanish ships anchoring off-shore to trade for local produce, mainly fish. War and politics were the froth floating on the reality of settlement and economy.

The Lordship of the Isles

Identity Through Materiality

David H. Caldwell

The Lordship of the Isles emerged in an archipelago that had been part of the Scandinavian World, and the lords were successors to a Scandinavian dynasty of kings based in the Isle of Man. Their direct twelfth-century ancestor, Ranald mac Somhairle, appears as a king in a European mould, possibly the builder of a large European style castle at Finlaggan in Islay and the founder of religious houses at Saddell in Kintyre and in Iona.¹ His thirteenth-century descendants and successors continued to play an active part in the politics of the British Isles. The MacDonald kindred, descended from his son Donald, aligned themselves with the cause of Robert Bruce in the Wars of Independence.

Yet the Lordship of the Isles which emerged in the fourteenth century under MacDonald leadership played down its Scandinavian heritage and was consciously a world apart from Lowland Scotland. Despite the fact that Donald, the son of John 1st Lord of the Isles by the king's daughter, was chosen to lead the clan after the death of his father in 1387 rather than his elder and apparently able half-brother Ranald,² there are no signs of any real intention to depart from a policy of creating a Gaelic lordship. By adopting their surname as a title – '*McDhomhnaill*' – at least from 1408, the lords were aligning themselves with, if not anticipating the practice of Irish kings. Inauguration rights for new lords and the maintenance of a Council (*recte* Parliament) of the Isles are other signs that the MacDonald kindred would not be bound by Stewart Scotland.³

There were no burghs, the bastions of European society, culture and trade, within the Lordship, surely as a result of deliberate decisions, and no evidence for any significant influx of fresh blood, especially in the form of specialists, from outwith native Ireland and the *Gàidhealtachd*. The lordship centres at Finlaggan in Islay, Aros in Mull and Ardtornish in Morvern are not castles such as gave prestige to other European magnates. Finlaggan was a residential, ceremonial and administrative complex with a large feasting hall, chapel and,

1 D.H. Caldwell, *Islay: the Land of the Lordship* (Edinburgh, 2008), 35–39.

2 Caldwell, *Islay*, 55.

3 Caldwell, *Islay*, 60–61.

probably, workshops. It had no fortifications. Aros and Ardtornish were essentially large feasting halls.⁴

In this paper we wish to review the material culture of the Lordship to ascertain whether it reflects a distinctive Gaelic culture or can tell us much more about the Lordship. While the period of our study covers the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries from beginning to end, it should be understood that there is very little precision in the dating of artefacts and a paucity of reliable archaeological evidence for datable contexts. We also rely heavily on representations on West Highland sculpture, the distribution of which does not coincide exactly with the bounds of the Lordship. It follows that there is a certain amount of fuzziness or arbitrariness about what is considered as fit material for discussion.

Apart from stray finds from the region, there is a handful of heirlooms and relics, the assemblages from excavations, principally at Finlaggan and Castle Sween, and the corpus of West Highland sculpture. Castle Sween seems only to have become a possession of the Lords of the Isles in 1376, was briefly garrisoned for the Crown by Lowland nobles in 1430 and was granted to the Campbells in 1481.⁵ Found well away from the Lordship, but possibly of relevance are at least some of the finds from Urquhart Castle on Loch Ness since they may belong to the periods from the end of the fourteenth century to the late fifteenth century when the castle was under the control of Clan Donald.⁶

Imports or locally made products – coinage, copper alloy artefacts, ceramics and souvenirs.

A useful starting point would be to establish what reliance there was in the Lordship on imports rather than on locally made goods. It cannot be doubted that there were merchants and trade routes that could facilitate the movement

4 For Finlaggan see D.H. Caldwell, *Islay, Jura and Colonsay: a Historical Guide* (Edinburgh, 2011), 167–179. A pre-publication version, currently seven fascicles, of the final report on the Finlaggan excavations – D.H. Caldwell (ed.), *Finlaggan, Islay – the Centre of the Lordship of the Isles: Excavations and Fieldwork 1989–98*, – can be accessed in the National Museums Scotland Research Repository at www.nms.ac.uk. For Aros and Ardtornish see D.H. Caldwell and N.A. Ruckley, 'Domestic Architecture in the Lordship of the Isles', in R.D. Oram and G. Stell (eds), *Lordship and Architecture in Medieval and Renaissance Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2005), 117–119; and D.H. Caldwell, 'Continuity and Change in Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Scotland: an Archaeological View', *Review of Scottish Culture* 18 (2006): 24, 27 n.48.

5 RCAHMS, *Argyll* 7, 259.

6 Caldwell, *Islay*, 58, 65.

of artefacts into the lordship. Safe-conducts for merchants of the Lords of the Isles to trade in England and Ireland are known to have been issued in 1338 and 1357. On the basis of their names most or all of the nine named individuals appear to have been based in Ireland.⁷ Local merchants, however, are difficult to identify. Possibly the Eoin and Domnall recorded on a grave-slab at Kilchiaran, Islay, were of that profession, the clue lying in a large barrel incorporated in the design of the slab.⁸ John Davidson, granted the Lordship land of Greenan, outside Ayr, in 1475,⁹ was clearly in a good position to act as his lord's local agent in matters of trade with the Lowlands.

Trade within the Lordship would not have been totally dependent on coinage as a medium of exchange – at least that would be a reasonable conclusion to reach on the basis of the lack of coin finds from the region (as others in Scotland). There are no coin hoards of the fourteenth century composed of pennies of Edward I, II and III and the only known hoard is a poorly recorded one from Killichonate in Lochaber dated after 1390.¹⁰ The next in date is one deposited after c. 1490 at Kilkerran in Kintyre,¹¹ and then one dating to the early sixteenth century from Nerabus in Islay.¹² There are stray pennies of Edward I from Colonsay and the Udal, North Uist,¹³ and an Edwardian penny, penny of John Balliol and groat of Robert III from excavations at Castle Sween.¹⁴ The corpus of 39 medieval coins from Finlaggan provides the most complete picture. Of these 21 are pennies and cut halfpennies of the thirteenth and early fourteenth century and five are groats and half-groats from the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. All of these coins would individually have had high purchasing power, small change only being represented by seven billon pennies of James I, II and III. Three class VI groats of James III (c. 1484–9) are thought to relate in some way to the end of medieval occupation at Finlaggan, the demise of the Lordship.¹⁵ The discovery in a

7 CDS, iii, nos 1273, 1639.

8 RCAHMS, *Argyll* 5, 195–196.

9 ALI, no. 105.

10 D.M. Metcalf, 'The Evidence of Scottish Coin Hoards for Monetary History', in D.M. Metcalf (ed.), *Coinage in Medieval Scotland (1100–1600)* (Oxford, 1977), no. 160.

11 Metcalf, 'Coin Hoards', no. 190.

12 J.D. Bateson, 'Roman and Medieval Coins Found in Scotland, to 1987', *PSAS* 119 (1989), 174.

13 Bateson, 'Coins', 172, 178.

14 N.M. McQ Holmes, 'Coins', in G. Ewart and J. Triscott, 'Archaeological Excavations at Castle Sween, Knapdale, Argyll and Bute, 1989–90', *PSAS* 126 (1996), 533–534.

15 N.M. McQ Holmes, 'The Coins', in D.H. Caldwell (ed.), *Finlaggan, Islay – the Centre of the Lordship of the Isles: Excavations and Fieldwork 1989–98* (forthcoming).

house at Finlaggan, occupied in the fifteenth century, of a purse, represented by its iron frame,¹⁶ also implies a daily need for coins.

There is little clear evidence for imports, either luxuries or everyday essentials. Much of the metalwork from excavations at Finlaggan, Castle Sween and elsewhere, whether of iron or copper alloy, looks little different in type and design from material that might turn up anywhere else in medieval Britain. A group of 40 copper alloy artefacts from the Finlaggan excavations has been analysed using X-ray fluorescence in the hope that this might help distinguish local products from imports. Most were identified as being composed of gunmetal, an alloy of copper with tin, zinc and lead. It is likely that this was because they were made from a range of re-cycled zinc-rich and tin-rich copper alloys rather than imported, unworked metals.¹⁷ This does not prove one way or another whether objects are imports but there are clues from Finlaggan for local manufacture of copper alloy artefacts. Fragments of crucibles may all be of thirteenth rather than fourteenth/fifteenth-century, but it is worth noting that the residues inside one were analysed and found to contain copper, zinc, lead and tin, suggesting that it was used for mixed copper alloys.¹⁸ An oval buckle and a harp peg appear to have been discarded in an unfinished state and are therefore likely to have been in production at Finlaggan, and since the analytical study referred to above was undertaken, other metalworking debris has been identified, including two copper alloy casting sprues.¹⁹ Fragments from the bodies of cast metal ewers and pots, which might be supposed to be imports, are made of heavily leaded bronze with the addition of antimony. The high levels of lead and antimony make the alloy weak and brittle but suitable for casting. Three legs from such vessels are curiously all of gun metal.²⁰

We are on surer ground with regard to distinguishing imports when it comes to pottery. There are 787 sherds of medieval wheel-turned pottery which are considered to be Scottish from the Finlaggan excavations. They fall into four broad groups on the basis of their fabric: white gritty, red ware, reduced sandy and partially reduced sandy.²¹ Evidence is limited on vessel forms, but jugs are certainly represented. Such sherds have been recovered in smaller

16 Finlaggan excavations: SF 12057 [12023]. Most of the finds from the excavations are currently housed in NMS. A few are displayed at the Finlaggan Visitor Centre in Islay.

17 D.H. Caldwell and K. Eremin, 'Preliminary Analysis of Copper Alloy Artifacts from Finlaggan', *Finds Research Group 700–1700 Datasheet* 25 (1999), 4–6.

18 Finlaggan excavations: SF 25446 [25002].

19 Finlaggan excavations: buckle: SF 1082 [1007]; harp pin: stray find from shore of Eilean Mór; casting sprues: SF 12390 [12138]; SF 19400 [19003].

20 Finlaggan excavations: NMS Analytical Research Report 7625.

21 V.E. Dean, 'The ceramics', in Caldwell (ed.) *Finlaggan* (forthcoming).

quantities from other sites in the Lordship, for example Castle Sween in Knapdale, where they are labelled in the report on the excavations as light gritty, red gritty and reduced gritty.²² Wheel-turned ceramics were made in vast quantities by professional potters at kilns within easy reach of urban markets. It is not expected that such kilns will be discovered within the Highlands and Islands, and the main types at Finlaggan can readily be matched by others from Ayr and elsewhere in the Lowlands.²³ At Finlaggan all four types have been recovered from deposits which can convincingly be dated to the thirteenth century. It is possible that many of these sherds recovered from fourteenth and fifteenth century contexts are actually residual, that is the vessels they are from had long been broken and discarded when the deposits from which they were recovered were formed. It would also be difficult to point to any incontrovertible evidence from the Finlaggan excavations that any particular wheel-turned vessel was in use in the fourteenth or fifteenth century.

There are also from the Finlaggan excavations over 1100 sherds of hand-made pottery considered to be of medieval date. Unlike the wheel-made pottery this is not the work of professional potters. The majority of sherds are from globular pots with everted rims ('croggans'), many used for cooking, but at least one vessel copied a wheel-made jug.²⁴ Handmade pottery is not represented at all in most assemblages of material from medieval sites in mainland Scotland and can in this case be seen as largely made in the vicinity of Finlaggan, perhaps with some coming in from other islands and Ireland. Much of it is indistinguishable from Ulster Coarse Ware. It is almost all from contexts of fourteenth-century or later date.

There is a suggestion here, which has to be followed up in future work, that in the time of the Lordship there was less requirement than previously for the import of wheel-made pottery. This may have been down to different patterns of food consumption, or because, for instance, the stuff previously imported in ceramic vessels now came in larger quantities in barrels. A jug, which might well be ceramic, and a bowl, are represented on a grave-slab at Kilninian in Mull, along with other symbols of status including a sword, casket, mirror, comb and shears.²⁵ In the writer's opinion this slab is more likely to date to

22 D. Caldwell and H. Stewart, 'The Ceramics', in Gordon Ewart and Jon Triscott, 'Archaeological Excavations at Castle Sween, Knapdale, Argyll and Bute, 1989–90', *PSAS* 126 (1996), 546–550.

23 Dean, 'The ceramics'.

24 Finlaggan excavations: SF 1064/1094 [1007].

25 RCAHMS, *Argyll* 5, 150, no 305 (4); K.A. Steer and J.W.M. Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture in the West Highlands* (Edinburgh, 1977), pl. 29C.

the late fifteenth century than the following century as suggested by the two authorities just cited. They use the sword on the slab as dating evidence but misunderstand it to be a 'claymore', a two-handed type.²⁶ The message must surely be that the person commemorated was a great provider of hospitality.

Not all goods from other parts were imported by merchants. One object in particular, from Finlaggan, is a reminder of that (Illus. 10.1). It is a base-metal



ILLUS. 10.1 *Base metal pilgrim's badge of the fourteenth century from Rome, with a depiction of St Peter. Found at Finlaggan.*

DRAWING BY MARION O'NEIL

26 Compare D.H. Caldwell, 'Claymores – the Two-handed Swords of the Scottish Highlanders', *London Park Lane Arms Fair* (2005), 49.

pilgrim badge dating to the fourteenth century. The image on it is of St Peter. When complete, there was a figure of St Paul alongside. This is typical of the souvenirs acquired by pilgrims to Rome. If it was not for this discovery we might not have imagined that Islesmen made that journey there.

Craftsmen – Textile Workers and Smiths

There is some evidence for craftsmen, as distinct from their work, in the Lordship of the Isles. That some of them were of high status in society appears to be confirmed by commemoration on grave-slabs and other monuments. Included are some of the carvers themselves, Domnall and Eoin Ó Brolcháin and at least one member of the Ó Cuinn family, called Mael-Sechlainn.²⁷ It is surprising that these are Irish names while the carving with which they are associated does not appear to be rooted in Ireland in any way. It is concentrated in mainland and insular Argyll along with Skye, and to a lesser extent the Outer Hebrides. Its distribution is thus not an exact fit with the Lordship although much of it must have been produced under the patronage of leading Islesmen. It is one of the most remarkable concentrations of medieval art anywhere in Europe.

There is a notable concentration of craftsmen, as well as members of a family of hereditary harpists, commemorated at the churches at Kilmory Knap and Keills on opposite sides of Loch Sween in Knapdale.²⁸ At Kilmory Knap there are two grave-slabs with representations of cloth-workers' cropping shears, one with an inscription to Henry Tulloch (Illus. 10.2).²⁹ Tulloch is not a local name but appears to be derived from the place-name in the parish of Dingwall in Ross;³⁰ so perhaps Tulloch was a master brought in to develop the local textile industry. It is noteworthy that when the Earl of Douglas came to meet Alexander, earl of Ross, in Knapdale in 1452 he was gifted some mantles. These mantles were presumably locally produced woollen plaids, tartan cloths that could double as cloaks and blankets. Ross presumably regarded them as a fitting return for the wine, clothes, silver, silk and English cloth brought by Douglas.³¹

27 Steer and Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture*, 105, 106–109, 134–135; RCAHMS, *Argyll* 7, 91.

28 RCAHMS, *Argyll* 7, nos 45, 76.

29 Ibid, 167.

30 G.F. Black, *The Surnames of Scotland* (reprinted, Edinburgh, 1993), 781.

31 C.A. McGladdery, *James II* (Edinburgh, 1990), 85, 167.



ILLUS. 10.2

Grave-slab of Henry Tulloch at Kilmory Knap with a pair of cropping shears.

PHOTO: THE AUTHOR

Metalworkers – smiths and/or armourers – are evidenced by inscriptions and images of their tools and equipment on grave-slabs and a cross. At Kilmory Knap ‘Cristinus Faber’ (Gilchrist the smith) appropriated the grave-slab of Henry Tulloch, adding an anvil, hammer and tongs,³² and another slab there commemorates ‘Iohannes Carpentarius’ (John the carpenter) and ‘Fratres Molmore et Cristinus Faber’ (the brothers Mael-Moire and Gilchrist, smiths). Steer and Bannerman suggest that these three men belonged to a family of craftsmen who produced shrines and the like – metalwork with wooden cores.³³ Their slab has a representation of a wooden block with one axe stuck in it and another alongside. At Keills there is a cross-shaft that commemorates Cristinus (Gilchrist) the smith, son of Celestinus (Gill-easbuig) Mac(Mh)ic-aid who Steer and Bannerman suggest might be of the same family as Sitric, son of Mac-aeda, the maker in the late eleventh century of the reliquary for the

32 Steer and Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture*, 150–151.

33 Ibid, 151.

Cathach in Kells, Ireland.³⁴ Also at Keills, the Cormac MacPhedran commemorated on a grave-slab may have been a member of a family of hereditary swordsmiths.³⁵

Kilmory Knap and Keills are both close to the important Lordship stronghold, Castle Sween, where excavations have led to the discovery of a metal-working workshop dated to the late thirteenth – early fourteenth century. It consisted of a timber-framed building with features interpreted as the sites of two forging hearths, a bellows and an anvil block. There was also a small stone-lined pit and, probably, a box for quenching forgings in water.³⁶

At Kilkivan in Kintyre there is a slab made for Comedinus (Gille-Coimded) to commemorate himself and his father Finlay. Its decoration includes a hammer, a pair of pincers and two anvils.³⁷ At Finlaggan a thirteenth- or fourteenth-century slab has had an anvil added to it (Illus. 10.3). In this case it might



ILLUS. 10.3

Detail of an anvil added to a grave-slab in the burial ground on Eilean Mór, Finlaggan.

PHOTO: THE AUTHOR

34 Ibid, 144–146.

35 Ibid, 146.

36 Ewart and Triscott, 'Castle Sween', 523–526.

37 Steer and Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture*, 155, pl. 1B (slab fourth from top).

reasonably be wondered if it commemorates a member of the family of hereditary smiths to the Lords of the Isles, well known from local tradition.³⁸ A medieval anvil, said to be associated with the Blacksmith of Clan Ranald, actually survives. It was found at Upper or High Mingarry in Moidart.³⁹

The work of Isles' blacksmiths is evident in the nails and other ironwork recovered from the Finlaggan, Castle Sween and other excavations. To what extent they operated as armourers and sword-smiths, as tradition avers, is not altogether clear. Links of mail have been recovered from Finlaggan and a fragment of plate armour from Castle Sween.⁴⁰ Expert opinion on swords of all types used across Scotland has tended to conclude that all or most blades were imported, particularly from Germany. Although we are dealing with a militarised society in the Isles the excavated record there contains little more than some arrowheads and links of mail. Recent technical examination, however, of a group of Scottish swords, including one from the River Ayr of a type used in the Highlands, suggests that Scottish manufacture is a distinct possibility.⁴¹

Towards an Inventory of Material Culture

Limited survival of artefacts and an absence of documentation mean that any attempt to build up an inventory of the material culture of the Lordship of the Isles is fraught with difficulties. Here we will concentrate on a few themes for which there is a certain amount of evidence.

Ships

Ships have been dealt with at some length by the author in another paper published in 2007,⁴² and are discussed in Colin Martin's paper in this present volume. A report on Isles' ships to the Scottish Privy Council is one of our main

38 Caldwell, *Islay*, 127–128.

39 H. Cheape, 'Clanranald's Blacksmith', *Clan Donald Magazine* 12 (1993), 99–100.

40 Finlaggan excavations: SF 1079 [1007], SF 8307 [8024], SF 12412 [12340], SF 19055 [19002], SF 25097 [25005]; D. Caldwell, 'Small Finds', in Ewart and Triscott, 'Castle Sween', 537, no. 12.

41 E. Photos-Jones, '"Made in Scotland?": sword-making in Scotland in the C15th and C16th in the context of recent archaeological evidence', in P.W.M. Freeman and A. Pollard (eds), *Fields of Conflict: Progress and Prospect in Battlefield Archaeology* (Oxford, 2001), 61–72.

42 D.H. Caldwell, 'Having the right kit: West Highlanders fighting in Ireland', in S. Duffy (ed), *The World of the Galloglass. Kings, warlords and warriors in Ireland and Scotland, 1200–1600* (Dublin, 2007), 144–151.

sources.⁴³ Although it dates to 1615 it is probably relevant to the vessels of the Lordship. It distinguishes between galleys, with between 18 and 24 oars, and birlings with 12 to 18 oars. There were also other boats with eight oars. Each oar was pulled by three men. There are several representations of these ships on West Highland sculpture which demonstrate they were clinker-built, open-hulled craft with high prows and sterns, each with a central mast with a rectangular sail and a rudder. They are clearly descendants of Viking long ships, designed for carrying large numbers of men. With up to 72 men rowing they could in reasonable weather make fast work of crossings between the islands and over to the Scottish mainland and Ireland. They were an essential element in projecting the military power of the Lordship.

There is little direct evidence for other types of ships in the Lordship, and it may be supposed that galleys and birlinns served as ferries and for other day to day activities. A charter of 1672, by which the Earl of Argyll leased the Island of Canna to the Captain of Clanranald, required the latter to maintain a galley for maintaining communications with Iona, apparently a provision from medieval times when Canna was a possession of Iona Abbey. The two and a half marks land of Lossit in Islay was required to supply a boat (*cymba*) with 14 oars, possibly for a similar purpose.⁴⁴

Caskets and Chests

No actual furniture survives or is represented in sculpture, but there is a fragment of an openwork wooden panel of tracery from King Fergus' Isle, Loch Laggan, Lochaber.⁴⁵ A likely explanation is that it is from a substantial piece of furniture, perhaps some type of cupboard. There are also two iron hasps from Finlaggan with a figure-of-eight form,⁴⁶ perhaps from large chests. Such chests might have been fully jointed with no other metalwork apart from a staple to connect with the hasp and a lock to secure the two together. Finlaggan has also produced several keys, padlocks and mounts which may be from chests or smaller caskets, like those which are represented on some West Highland grave-slabs.⁴⁷ There is another key from Eilean Mhic Iain in Islay, the caput of

43 *RPC*, 3rd series, x (Edinburgh, 1891), 347–348.

44 D.H. Caldwell, 'The Lossit Cymba', *West Highland Notes & Queries*, ser 3, no 12 (August 2008), 3–11.

45 S. Maxwell, 'Discoveries Made in 1934 on King Fergus' Isle and Elsewhere in Loch Laggan, Inverness-shire', *PSAS* 85 (1950–51), 161, fig. 2.

46 Finlaggan excavations: SF 1023 [1007] and SF 12049 [12023].

47 Finlaggan excavations, e.g. keys SF 8026 [8002], SF 9001 [9002], SF 12012 [12014], SF 12282 [12101] and SF 25131 and SF 25136 [both from the loch]; hasp SF 8104 [8016],

the estate of Lossit,⁴⁸ and a casket-handle, in a private collection, from the shore of Loch Ballygrant, Islay, adjacent to the island dwelling that was probably a residence of the Bishops of the Isles.⁴⁹ Two complete caskets survive, both now in National Museums Scotland (NMS). Both are of whale-bone decorated with interlace panels and have copper alloy mounts.⁵⁰ One of them is known to have come from Eglinton Castle in Ayrshire, the home of the Montgomeries, Earls of Eglinton (Illus. 10.4). It may be of relevance to note that an ancestor, Sir John Montgomerie of Ardrossan, married Agnes, a daughter of John 1st Lord of the Isles.⁵¹ Such caskets were probably more typically of wood,



ILLUS. 10.4 *Casket of whale-bone, from Eglinton Castle, now in NMS.*

PHOTO: NATIONAL MUSEUMS SCOTLAND.

and mounts SF 8104 [8016] and SF 11032 [11018]; Steer and Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture*, 175–176.

48 NMS: K.2002.304.

49 Caldwell, *Islay, Jura and Colonsay*, 181.

50 V. Glenn, *Romanesque & Gothic Decorative Metalwork and Ivory Carvings in the Museum of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2003), 186–191.

51 *ALI*, 298.

perhaps covered in leather, like one in NMS.⁵² This concentration of evidence for caskets at lordship centres in Islay is one of the largest in the British Isles.

The representation of such caskets in West Highland sculpture, it has been suggested,⁵³ is because they were containers for documents. To have documents, particularly ones recording the holding of land, would have been a key indicator of status and therefore worthy of commemoration on monuments to the dead. The suggestion from the archaeological record that such caskets were commonly in use at Finlaggan tallies with our understanding that it was a lordly residence and a place where great men came to participate in council meetings.

Seals, Heraldry and Literacy

There should be no surprise that Lords of the Isles, and other leading family members, appended seals to documents issued in their name. Those that survive, for Donald, Alexander and John 4th Lord, have designs based on their coats-of-arms, and thus conform to contemporary fashions for nobles elsewhere in Scotland.⁵⁴ Indeed the seal matrices are probably the work of seal-engravers based in burghs in the Lowlands. They indicate that the arms adopted for the Lordship consisted, basically, of a lymphad surmounted by an eagle.⁵⁵ A few warrior effigies, all likely to be fourteenth-century in date, carry shields, and it is probable that the main function of the shields was to display armorial bearings, now too worn for identification. An exception to this is an effigy at Iona commemorating Bricius (Gille-Brigde) MacFhionghuin, charged with a galley above an otter pursuing a fish, and a lion (?).⁵⁶ Otherwise there is little evidence for an interest in, or the use of heraldry in the Lordship. There are no armorial panels of medieval date and heraldry hardly features in other West Highland sculpture.

No seals survive for bishops of the Isles or for Oronsay Priory, Saddell Abbey and Iona Nunnery, though it might reasonably be supposed that they would have had a need for them. A twelfth-century seal is known for Iona Abbey.⁵⁷ No

52 NMS: H.UD 12.

53 D.H. Caldwell et al., 'The Image of a Celtic Society: Medieval West Highland Sculpture', in P. O'Neill (ed.), *Celts in Legend and Reality: Papers from the Sixth Australian Conference of Celtic Studies, University of Sydney, July 2007* (Sydney, 2010), 43–44.

54 ALI, 316–317.

55 B.A. McAndrew, *Scotland's Historic Heraldry* (Woodbridge, 2006), 225, 299, 467.

56 Steer and Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture*, fig. 5.

57 J.H. Stevenson and M. Wood, *Scottish Heraldic Seals: Royal, official, Ecclesiastical, Burghal, Personal* (Glasgow, 1940), vol. 1, 184.

seals survive for other leading men of Isles' society, with the possible exception of a lead seal matrix from Dunstaffnage Castle in Lorn with an image of a galley which may have belonged to a thirteenth- or fourteenth-century gentleman of Clan Donald.⁵⁸ From Finlaggan comes another lead matrix, vesica-shaped, of an unidentified cleric, perhaps a priest. He is represented kneeling in prayer before the Virgin and Child (Illus. 10.5).⁵⁹

Are we to imagine that only one medieval cleric had his own seal matrix? Although no other seals are known, this find might suggest we are dealing with a lack of evidence for seals rather than a society with no use for them. The extent of literacy in the Lordship and the reliance placed on writings cannot be known, but if we are right in identifying the caskets depicted on grave monuments as charter boxes then reading and writing may have been skills widely spread amongst officials and the upper classes. It is known that members of the medical kindred, the Beatons, possessed treatises by medico-philosophers including Avicenna and Averroes.⁶⁰ To counter this impression, however, we



ILLUS. 10.5

Impression from a lead seal matrix, probably of a cleric, found at Finlaggan.

PHOTO: NATIONAL MUSEUMS SCOTLAND

58 D. Caldwell, 'Other Small finds', in John Lewis, 'Dunstaffnage Castle, Argyll and Bute: Excavations in the North Tower and East Range, 1987–94', *PSAS* 126 (1996), 582.

59 This matrix is a stray find, exhibited by the Finlaggan Trust in their visitor centre.

60 J. Bannerman, *The Beatons: a Medical Kindred in the Classical Gaelic Tradition* (Edinburgh, 1998), 89, 114–116.

must consider the one surviving Gaelic charter emanating from the Lordship, drawn up in 1408.⁶¹ It is signed by Donald, Lord of the Isles and Fergus Mac bethad, the head of the Beaton kindred in Islay. The other witnesses, Eoin MacDomnail (Donald's uncle and eponym of Clann Iain Mhor), Pàdrui Mac a' Bhriuthainn and Aodh MacAoidh, merely record their marks. It is surprising to see that Pàdrui, in particular, supposed to be the Islay-based judge or lawman, could not even write his name.

Clothing, Pins, Brooches and Buckles

No clothing survives, only representations of it in sculpture, and practically no documentary sources with useful descriptions. With such a limited range of source material it is impossible to track or date with any certainty the full range of clothing worn, dress codes applicable to different social classes and professions, and any changes of fashion. There are several representations of clerics and nuns but no real evidence that their vestments and habits departed markedly from mainstream European fashions. They will not be considered here.

There is a slab in the church at Kilmory Knap with a half-size effigy of a man dressed in a knee-length, pleated garment with long sleeves and a high neck, belted at the waist (Illus. 10.6).⁶² A huntsman with a similar garment is shown in the same church on MacMillan's Cross, which probably dates to the late fifteenth century. He also has a shoulder length, hooded cape with a long liripipe dangling from the apex of the hood.⁶³ There is another similarly dressed huntsman on a slab at Kildalton, Islay.⁶⁴ Other West Highland images of laymen are small scale, like the representations of Tomás and Pàdrui (Mac bethad) on the late fourteenth-century cross at Kilchoman, Islay,⁶⁵ but they apparently wear similar garments.

These garments may not have been much different from those worn elsewhere in Scotland at the time. They can be compared, for example, to two of the mourners on a mid fifteenth-century tomb front at the Abbey Church, Coupar Angus.⁶⁶ Comparisons might also be made with sculptural representations in Ireland, like, for instance, a figure of a layman in the cloister arcade at Jerpoint, Co Kilkenny, Ireland. The carving dates to c. 1400 and depicts a

61 *ALI*, no. 16.

62 RCAHMS, *Argyll* 7, 168, fig. D(36), 169.

63 *Ibid.*, 169–172.

64 RCAHMS, *Argyll* 5, 214, fig B(14).

65 Caldwell, *Islay*, 129.

66 D.H. Caldwell (ed.), *Angels, Nobles and Unicorns: Art and Patronage in Medieval Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1982), 66.



ILLUS. 10.6

Grave-slab at Kilmory Knap with the effigy of a civilian man.

PHOTO: THE AUTHOR

hooded shoulder-cape over a tunic.⁶⁷ Hoods with liripipes are known to have been widely worn across Europe, even in the Norse settlement in Greenland.⁶⁸

It is not clear, however, whether these garments are a type of over-garment – a coat; or else a less substantial covering – a shirt. If a coat, the carvings of two hunters on the monument to Alasdair Crotach (MacLeòid) of Dunvegan (died 1528) in St Clement's Church, Rodel, Harris, are of relevance.⁶⁹ Both men wear short garments which can be identified as a type of coat listed in the Lord Treasurer's accounts for 1538 as part of an ensemble of Highland clothing made for King James V. There it is described as a short Highland coat, in this case made of velvet, but 'variant cullorit'.⁷⁰ So such coats might be similar to the garments shown on earlier carvings, just fashionably shorter.

67 J. Hunt, *Irish Medieval Figure Sculpture 1200–1600* (Dublin and London, 1974), vol. 1, cat. No. 125 h; vol. 2, pl. 128.

68 J. Arneborg, 'Greenland and Europe', in W.W. Fitzhugh and E.I. Ward (eds), *Vikings: the North Atlantic Saga* (Washington, 2000), 315, illus. 23.16.

69 Steer and Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture*, pl. 32.

70 *TA*, vi, 436; J. Telfer Dunbar, *History of Highland Dress* (London, 1962), 26.

Holland cloth (linen) was also provided to make 'syde heland sarkis' for the king, that is Highland long shirts. One of the Rodel figures is wearing such a garment under his coat. It appears pleated and extends to mid shin. So perhaps it is a shirt like this that the effigy at Kilmory Knap is wearing. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century commentators describe Highlanders' shirts as dyed with saffron,⁷¹ and so they may have been in earlier times. An earlier account of an Islesman wearing a shirt is contained in a near contemporary account of Alexander, Lord of the Isles' humiliating submission to King James I in 1429. He appeared on his knees in the abbey church of Holyrood in a shirt and drawers (camisia et femoralibus).⁷² Does the mention of drawers imply that Alexander's shirt was not as long as the Rodel hunter's?

Whether Holland cloth was all imported or some was being manufactured in the Isles is not known. Hoods and coats would have been of woollen cloth – white, black and gray (tartan?) as the 60 ells required yearly by the Augustinian Abbey of Derry from its land at Nerabus in Islay.⁷³

The mantles (see above) which were deemed such an appropriate gift for the Earl of Douglas in 1452 can reasonably be identified as plaids. John Major, in his 1521 history of Greater Britain, says that Highlanders wore them over their shirts. The word actually used by Major in his Latin text is 'chlamyde'.⁷⁴ Possibly the earliest representation of a man wearing a plaid over a shirt is on a sculpture on the exterior of the tower of St Clements's Church, Rodel, Harris, which may date to the early sixteenth century. It is slipping off the right shoulder and wound diagonally round his left hip. The wearing of plaids over shirts is well attested from the sixteenth century onwards.⁷⁵

The dress of lay women is even harder to identify. A slab in the old burial ground at Kilarrow, Islay, has an image of one in a long, sleeved dress with pleated skirt. She wears a cape over this, covering her breast and extending to her elbows (Illus. 10.7). Another image of a woman, a stone carving from the MacDougall castle of Gylen in the island of Kerrera, dating to the late sixteenth century, shows similar clothing, the cape fastened at the neck by a large circular brooch.⁷⁶ This may be evidence that fashion for some women in the Isles

71 Major, *History*, 49; Martin Martin, *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland circa 1695* (Edinburgh, 1994), 245.

72 Chron Bower, viii, 262–263.

73 Caldwell, *Islay*, 74; G. Gregory Smith (ed), *The Book of Islay* (privately printed, 1895), 91.

74 John Major, *Historia Majoris Britanniae Tam Angliae Quam Scotiae* (Edinburgh, 1740), 34; cf. translated version in Major, *History*, 49.

75 Dunbar, *Highland Dress*, passim.

76 RCAHMS, *Argyll* 2, pl. 65G.



ILLUS. 10.7

Grave-slab in the burial ground at Kilarrow with a representation of a lady.

PHOTO: R.C. GRAHAM

and neighbouring areas remained fairly static long after the collapse of the Lordship. This dress is rather different from that of Mariota MacIain on a sixteenth-century slab at Oronsay Priory and the image of the wife of Somhairle MacDhùghaill on the early sixteenth-century lid of a tomb-chest at Ardchattan

Priory in Lorn.⁷⁷ Both have long head-dresses, and long robes under a cloak, in the case of Mariota clearly fastened at the neck by a large circular brooch. Both outfits appear to reflect fashions in Lowland Scotland that may have been percolating into the Isles no earlier than the late fifteenth century.

Circular brooches do survive – heirlooms, stray finds and three excavated at Finlaggan. They are variants of a pan-European type of annular form with a free-swivelling pin and a hoop with a relatively broad, flat, often decorated, surface. Possibly they were worn by men as well as women, though Martin noted at the end of the seventeenth century that only women then used brooches ('buckles') for their arisaids (plaids worn by women), the men fastening their plaids with a pin.⁷⁸ Large, stiff, pins, mostly of metal, often called 'stick pins' in the archaeological literature, do survive. On the basis of a survey of the collections of NMS it is clear that neither fifteenth-century and later brooches nor pins have a distribution that extends much outside of the Highlands. This tends to reinforce our impression that there were different dress styles there than in the Lowlands. The continued use of brooches and pins may specifically relate to the wearing of plaids and arisaids. There are two copper alloy dress pins of medieval date from Finlaggan and another two from the island dwelling, Eilean Mhic Iain, in Loch Lossit, Islay.⁷⁹ Typically these pins have a plain shaft and button head and a length of about 80 to 90 mm. One of the Eilean Mhic Iain pins has a beaded stem and is 185 mm long.

One of the finest brooches from the Isles is of gold with a modest diameter of 23 mm.⁸⁰ It is engraved on both sides with amuletic inscriptions – IESVS Nazerenvs R (Jesus of Nazareth, King), and Iasper Melchitr Atrop (representing two of the Magi and one of the Fates. It was found in Islay, but its material and inscriptions links it closely with another brooch in the form of a chain of six wyverns, known as the Kames Brooch through its former ownership by the Bannatynes of Kames in Bute.⁸¹ Both are likely to date to about 1300 and be of Lowland Scottish manufacture.

Ring brooches seem to have first made their appearance in the northern parts of Britain about 1300,⁸² but so far the gold brooch from Islay is the only

77 Steer and Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture*, pls 7C, 26D.

78 Martin, *Western Islands*, 247.

79 Finlaggan excavations: SF 18132 [18065] and SF 23023 [23018]; Eilean Mhic Iain – NMS: K.2002.285 and 305.

80 NMS: H.NGA 133.

81 R.B.K. Stevenson, 'The Kames Brooch', *PSAS* 95 (1961–2), 308–309.

82 Glenn, *Metalwork*, 56–81.

such brooch from the lands of the Lordship which can confidently be dated so early. Other finds from the Isles are all likely to date to the fifteenth century or later and are probably of local manufacture, like two copper alloy ones from Finlaggan, one with an engraved foliage design,⁸³ and a fine silver, octagonal brooch from Kengharair in Mull (Illus. 10.8).⁸⁴ It is inlaid with niello and engraved with amuletic inscriptions, beasts and foliage. It can readily be seen as a prototype for the series of beautifully decorated Highland brooches, still being made and worn in the eighteenth century.

Three large silver brooches with central crystals, probably all of the fifteenth century despite traditions connecting two of them to Robert Bruce, may have been badges of office or other symbols of authority.⁸⁵ That brooches might have such a function is suggested by the tradition that the chiefs of the Gunns had a large silver brooch to mark their role as Coroners of Caithness.⁸⁶ So could the brooch that belonged to MacAoidh of Ugadale in Kintyre be a mark of their hereditary role as Maers of North Kintyre? The other two brooches in the group are associated with Mac Ghill' Eathain of Lochbuy in Mull and, outside the Lordship, MacDougall of Dunollie.



ILLUS. 10.8

Silver brooch with niello decoration from Kengharair in Mull.

PHOTO: NATIONAL MUSEUMS SCOTLAND

83 Finlaggan excavations: SF 1005 [1007]; SF 7316 [7027].

84 NMS: H.NGA 116. See Glenn, *Metalwork*, 72–73.

85 Caldwell (ed.), *Angels, Nobles and Unicorns*, 58–59.

86 F. Adam, *The Clans, Septs and Regiments of the Scottish Highlands* (Edinburgh, 1977), 224.

Several small personal fittings of copper alloy including buckles and belt-fittings have been found at Finlaggan. These are mostly indistinguishable from other similar items found elsewhere in Britain, especially the large assemblage recovered from London.⁸⁷ More analytical examination is necessary to see if they are locally made or imported. The main point of interest for us at present is that such items should occur in numbers alongside more distinctively local dress items.

Grooming – Shears, Combs and Mirrors

Shears are represented on many West Highland grave monuments, apparently the equivalent of our scissors rather than the great cropping shears on the slab of Henry Tulloch, mentioned above. In one case, on a slab at Craighouse in Jura, scissors are represented.⁸⁸ Shears are a common motif on medieval grave monuments throughout Britain. Possible symbolical meanings are reviewed for West Highland sculpture, and rejected by Steer and Bannerman.⁸⁹ They note that they appear on the grave-slabs of both men and women and do not favour the idea that they refer allegorically to the cutting of the thread of life.

Combs sometimes also appear on grave-slabs and also circular objects identified as mirrors. In some cases all three appear together, as on slabs at Keills and Kilmory in Knapdale, and Kilninian in Mull.⁹⁰ In the latter example the object identified as a mirror appears as a square containing a circular depression. Perhaps the message that was intended was that those commemorated valued being well groomed – surely a sign of greatness or status?

Two bronze mirror cases have been recovered from the Lordship, both typical of personal vanity mirrors from elsewhere in Europe. One is from Tungadal in Skye,⁹¹ the other from Eilean Mhic Iain in Islay (Illus. 10.9).

87 For instance, buckles SF 25174 and SF 25180 [both from the loch]; strap-loop SF 25180 [loch]; belt mount with suspension loop SF 30094 [loch]; and forked spacer from a strap-end SF 1105 [1033]. For London comparanda see G Egan and F Pritchard, *Medieval Finds from Excavations in London: 3. Dress Accessories c. 1150–c. 1450* (London, 1991).

88 RCAHMS, *Argyll* 5, 164, C(6).

89 Steer and Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture*, 174.

90 RCAHMS, *Argyll* 7, 91, no 45 (21); 166, no 76 (23); RCAHMS, *Argyll* 3, 150, no 305 (4); and Steer and Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture*, pl. 29.

91 R. Miket and D.L. Roberts, *The Mediaeval Castles of Skye and Lochalsh* (Edinburgh, 2007), p. xxvi.



ILLUS. 10.9

*Copper alloy mirror case from Eilean
Mhic Iain in Islay.*

PHOTO: NATIONAL MUSEUMS SCOTLAND

Arms and Armour

Arms and armour have been dealt with elsewhere at some length by the author.⁹² Representations in West Highland sculpture and information from limited documentary sources make it clear that the normal fighting attire of warriors was a quilted coat (aketon), a mail collar and a bascinet (helmet). Armour like this was very conservative, but relatively cheap, and allowed more movement than more expensive suits of plate armour. Aketons, like modern day anoraks, would also have provided warmth and water-proofing, and would, therefore, have been ideal for sea voyages in inclement weather. The only armour that survives is some fragments of mail from Finlaggan and a small piece of plate armour from Castle Sween.⁹³

West Highland sculpture is not a good guide for the weaponry in use with its almost exclusive representation of swords, apparently often ideal images of swords rather than those actually in use.⁹⁴ The majority of warriors may not

92 Caldwell, 'Having the Right Kit', 151–168.

93 Finlaggan excavations: SF 1079 [1007], SF 8307 [8024], SF 12412 [12340], SF 19055 [19002] and SF 25097 [25005]; Caldwell, 'Castle Sween Small Finds', 537, no. 12.

94 Caldwell, 'Having the Right Kit', 159–168; Caldwell et al, 'The Image of a Celtic Society', 39–42.

have had swords, and no actual swords survive with reliable provenances connecting them to the Lordship. Several swords from Ireland, however, are assumed to relate to the activities of West Highland mercenaries.⁹⁵

Spears were probably being phased out in the fourteenth century in favour of axes, and many fought as archers. There are two spearheads from Castle Sween, one with a leaf-shaped blade, the other with a blade like a spike, diamond-shaped in cross-section, designed for penetrating armour and reinforced clothing.⁹⁶ There is another spearhead with a leaf-shaped blade from Finlaggan and a spike-blade one from Urquhart Castle.⁹⁷ The latter castle has also produced a collection of military arrowheads, obviously stock-piled for use in defence. They mostly have armour-penetrating long spike blades.⁹⁸ It is unfortunate that we cannot tell whether they were there to repel attacks by the force of the Lordship or were for the Islesmen to defend themselves from the forces of the Crown. There is also a similar spike arrowhead from Castle Sween.⁹⁹ No battle-axes survive from the lands of the Lordship, but there are a few representations in sculpture, including one being wielded by the figure of a warrior, representing Ragnall of Islay, on a cross-shaft from Texa, and another on a slab at Kilmory Knap.¹⁰⁰

Swords and bascinet and aketon-clad warriors are amongst the most prevalent images in West Highland sculpture, and whatever else, confirm the militarisation of Isles' society. They are also redolent of the Scandinavian heritage of the Islesmen. The swords, typically with drooping quillons and lobated pomels, are generally considered a Scandinavian type, while bascinets and aketons are reminiscent of the attire of the warders (rooks) in the famous hoard of chessmen found in Lewis. They are Scandinavian work of the late twelfth and early thirteenth century.¹⁰¹

95 A. Halpin, 'Irish Medieval Swords, c. 1170–1600', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 86C no. 5 (1986), 183–230.

96 Caldwell, 'Castle Sween Small Finds', nos 15, 16.

97 Finlaggan excavations: SF 12050/51 [12023]; R. Samson, 'Finds from Urquhart Castle in the National Museum', *PSAS* 112 (1982), 469, no. 31.

98 Samson, 'Finds from Urquhart Castle', 466–469, nos 10, 18–29.

99 Caldwell, 'Castle Sween Small Finds', no. 17.

100 D.H. Caldwell, 'Some Notes on Scottish Axes and Long Shafted Weapons', in D.H. Caldwell (ed.), *Scottish Weapons and Fortifications 1100–1800* (Edinburgh, 1981), 262–263, fig. 141; 264–265, fig. 142.

101 D.H. Caldwell, M.A. Hall and C.M. Wilkinson, 'The Lewis Hoard of gaming Pieces: a Re-examination of their Context, Meanings, Discovery and Manufacture', *Medieval Archaeology* 53 (2009), 193–196.

Hunting, Music and Games

Another popular image in West Highland sculpture is the hunt, with a hunting dog attacking deer, as on MacMillan's Cross at Kilmory Knap and Ragnall of Islay's cross from Texa.¹⁰² The former cross also depicts a hunter with a horn slung on a baldric across his body. It is probably no coincidence that both men commemorated were clan leaders, for hunting was a privilege reserved for the top men in society. In a telling remark Dean Monro wrote in 1549 how the Council of the Isles used to convene at Finlaggan, even though the Lord was away hunting.¹⁰³ Two of the arrowheads recovered from excavations at Finlaggan are of a classic hunting type with barbs.¹⁰⁴ Animals other than deer are shown in hunting scenes on West Highland sculpture, including boars, as on the late fourteenth or early fifteenth-century commemorative cross that now stands in Inverary. It also has a horseman with a hawk at his wrist.¹⁰⁵ Other monuments, like a grave-slab of the so-called Loch Sween school at Oronsay Priory, has a hunting scene with hounds, but also includes an otter with a salmon.¹⁰⁶

Dean Monro makes several references to hunting in his description of the Isles. He mentions tinchells in Jura and Rum – that is the process of driving deer towards the waiting hunters. He also indicates the importance of falconry by recording falcons' and hawks' nests. The sandy banks of Loch Gruinart in Islay provided good sport for hunting seals with specially trained dogs.¹⁰⁷

There is a grave-slab in the church at Keills, at the mouth of Loch Sween, which includes a harp, or clarsach, in its decoration. It has, therefore, not unreasonably, been considered to be a memorial to one of the MacIlschenochs, a family of hereditary harpers to the Lords of the Isles, who held lands in Kintyre.¹⁰⁸ The representation of the harp is reminiscent of the Queen Mary Harp in NMS believed to be of West Highland provenance and of fifteenth-century, if not earlier, date (Illus. 10.10).¹⁰⁹ The importance of harp music in lordly entertainment is suggested by the recovery of a harp pin and coiled

102 RCAHMS, *Argyll* 7, 169–172; Steer and Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture*, pl. 24D.

103 R.W. Munro (ed.), *Monro's Western Isles of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1961), 57.

104 Finlaggan excavations: SF 6124 [6022] and SF 16028 [16015].

105 RCAHMS, *Argyll* 7, 75–76, no. 36.

106 RCAHMS, *Argyll* 5, 247, B(11).

107 *Monro's Western Isles*, 50, 55–56, 66, 129, 131.

108 Steer and Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture*, 146.

109 Caldwell, *Angels, Nobles and Unicorns*, 60–61.



ILLUS. 10.10

The Queen Mary Harp.

PHOTO: NATIONAL MUSEUMS SCOTLAND

copper alloy wire, almost certainly a harp string, from Castle Sween, and four harp pins from Finlaggan.¹¹⁰

While an interest in bagpipes in the lordship would not be unlikely, there is no evidence for such. The earliest record of Highlanders – and in the context, men from Argyll – being led by a piper into battle, is the siege of Haddington in 1548.¹¹¹ There is evidence from medieval Finlaggan and Castle Sween of an interest in another musical instrument, the Jew's harp.¹¹² These were popular throughout Europe.

A number of decorated bone tablemen have been recovered from the Isles, including three from Finlaggan and single pieces from Iona and Rum. Finlaggan has also produced 38 stone discs, Castle Sween two, most of which were most

110 Caldwell, 'Castle Sween Small Finds', 535–537, nos 7 and 8. Two of the harp pins from Finlaggan are unstratified. The other two, SF 3019 [3014] and SF 7272 [7100] are from contexts that probably pre-date the fourteenth century.

111 Jean de Beaugué, *Histoire de la Guerre d'Ecosse: pendant les campagnes 1548 et 1549* (Maitland Club, 1830), 62.

112 Finlaggan excavations: SF 6090 [6018]; Caldwell, 'Castle Sween Small Finds', 539, no. 27.

probably used for board games.¹¹³ Two pieces of slate from Castle Sween are crudely incised with games' boards, probably for alquerque (a precursor of draughts). One of them has a layout on the other side, possibly for 'nine men's morris'.¹¹⁴ From Finlaggan comes another gaming board, probably for alquerque, scratched on a roof slate, but its context indicates a thirteenth-century date.¹¹⁵ Surviving Gaelic poetry from the seventeenth century onwards cites the playing of games as one of the key attributes of a great man.¹¹⁶

Conclusions – Including the Importance of West Highland Sculpture

Firm conclusions are beyond the reach of such a slight survey as this. Nevertheless, it is possible to detect certain trends and suggest some facets of material culture which deserve more research.

While the Scandinavian heritage of the Isles is evident in the ships and arms and armour represented in West Highland sculpture, the emergence of a Gaelic culture can be traced in such things as clothing, dress accessories, including brooches and stick pins, and iconic objects like the Queen Mary Harp. Central to our understanding of all this is the corpus of West Highland sculpture which itself is a key indicator of a distinctive culture located in the Hebrides and mainland Argyll in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Its roots in the Scandinavian world and mainland Britain, as well as influences from earlier sculpture in the region, have been explored by the author elsewhere, and an explanation offered as to its distribution and subject matter – that it to a considerable extent commemorates a warrior caste.¹¹⁷ Isles' society supported a force of over 6000 warriors and the ships to take them to fight in the Scottish mainland and in Ireland.¹¹⁸ The sculpture reflects this militarised society and provides a window on other matters like clothing, hunting and equipment.

Isles' society was Gaelic and militarised, turning in on itself, consciously different from Lowland society? That may largely have been true, but some clues which have only really emerged as a result of the excavations at Finlaggan

113 Glenn, *Metatwork*, 184–185; M.A. Hall, 'The Gaming Equipment', in Caldwell (ed.), *Finlaggan* (forthcoming); Caldwell, 'Castle Sween Small Finds', 542, nos 49 and 50.

114 Caldwell, 'Castle Sween Small Finds', 542, nos 51 and 52.

115 Hall, 'The Gaming Equipment' (SF 8483 [8109]).

116 J. MacInnes, 'The panegyric code in Gaelic poetry and its historical background', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* 50 (1976–8), 435–498.

117 Caldwell et al, 'The Image of a Celtic Society'.

118 This is dealt with in detail in a forthcoming paper by the author, 'The Sea Power of the Western Isles of Scotland in the Medieval Period', to be published in a volume of papers edited by J.H. Barrett on *Maritime Societies of the Viking and Medieval World*.

modify this image. They suggest such things as a money economy, use of seals and, possibly, an importance attached to the written record, particularly documents recording transactions. None of these things are the antithesis of a Gaelic way of life but, if present, give a more rounded picture of a distinctive society. While excavations at both Finlaggan and Castle Sween have shed some light on local metalworking it is to be hoped that more work in future will tell us much more about how craftsmen operated outside the system, seen as the norm for the rest of Scotland, of craftsmen regulated by guilds in the burghs.

The information we have been able to glean from the ceramics and copper alloy personal fittings from Finlaggan is limited in value in terms of what it might tell us about trade between the Lordship and other parts. Yet, the archaeological record is more likely in the longer term than documentary sources to provide us with new information on this subject. Given the distinctive character of the Lordship an assessment of its trade links would seem to be a reasonable priority for future archaeological research.

A Spent Force?

The Clan Donald in the Aftermath of 1493¹

Alison Cathcart

From a traditional, perhaps even Lowland, perspective, the 1493 forfeiture of the lordship of the Isles was the death blow to an unruly, disloyal kindred beyond the reach of royal authority to which it was consistently antagonistic. It brought about the destruction of MacDonald dominance in the West coupled with the rise of the house of Argyll and, by the end of the sixteenth century, the Mackenzies of Kintail, both clans that were loyal to the crown. Indeed, the increased assertion of royal authority throughout the western Highlands and Isles culminated in the ‘pacification’ of the region by James VI following his succession to the thrones of England and Ireland in 1603. However, such an interpretation of events reflects traditional prejudices against Highland clan-ship, regarded as barbaric and backwards, and asserts the inevitable triumph of the crown and civilised, law-abiding society. Thus it juxtaposes the ascendancy of royal authority against the demise of Clan Donald and views the forfeiture of 1493 as an end point. While 1493 may have signalled the end of the lordship as it had existed since the early fourteenth century, this paper seeks to question the extent to which MacDonald influence in the West was cauterised by one single, albeit hugely significant event.

Island Rebellions

Whatever the interpretation of the forfeiture of 1493, it is clear that the initial forfeiture of 1476 severely weakened the MacDonald lordship and hastened its demise. In 1476 John, 4th Lord, lost Kintyre, Knapdale and the earldom of Ross, after which divisions that had existed within the lordship widened.² Angus Óg, John’s son and recognised heir, who had played a prominent role within the lordship prior to the forfeiture of 1476, resented what he regarded as his father’s humiliating submission to the crown. Immediately afterwards he may have tried

1 I would like to express my gratitude to Steve Boardman, Jane Dawson and Allan Macinnes for comments on (much) earlier drafts of this paper.

2 *RMS*, ii, 1246; *APS*, ii, 108–109, 111, 113; *ALI*, nos. 109a, 109b. John also lost all castles within these lands and the sheriffdom of Inverness and Nairn.

to enlist his father's support in efforts to recover former lordship territory but by 1480 there was conflict between the two men and dissent within the wider Clan Donald.³ Angus set out to deprive John 'of all management and authority' which culminated in a sea battle near Tobermory in 1481, generally known as the battle of Bloody Bay.⁴ Angus, at the head of the Clan Donald, fought against his father who was supported by the chiefs of other lordship clans. After a seemingly inconclusive outcome at Bloody Bay, Angus' actions suggest that, despite his father's position, it was the son who had real influence throughout the lordship. He attempted to recover former lordship territories, mainly through force, and maintained the islanders 'in obedience while he was sole lord over them'.⁵ By 1485 he appears to have been reconciled to his father but further efforts to recover the earldom of Ross were brought to an abrupt end when in 1490 he was murdered by his own Irish harper.⁶ In the aftermath 'the Islanders, and the rest of the Highlanders, were let loose, and began to shed one another's blood', unrest which contributed to the final forfeiture of 1493.⁷

Evidently, John was no longer able to perform the vital function of maintaining stability in the west and, as internal divisions deepened, the writing was on the wall for the lordship. If the island Lord could not deliver on this front, his position was vulnerable. While previous Lords had retained their dominant position in the west despite instances of rebellion because of their ability to secure overall stability, by the late fifteenth century circumstances had changed and both crown and parliament were less tolerant of Highland unrest, especially when the repercussions of this unrest were felt in the Lowlands.⁸ The main problem was what to put in its place once MacDonald power had been removed. Successive monarchs and governments attempted to deal with the post-forfeiture situation in various ways ranging from military expeditions to gain submissions and impose royal authority, and imprisonment, to co-operation and collaboration. However, the piecemeal implementation of such policies served to intensify unrest so the crown relied increasingly on regional power

3 ALI, no. 117; N Macdougall, 'Achilles' Heel? The Earldom of Ross, the Lordship of the Isles, and the Stewart Kings, 1449–1507' in E.J. Cowan and R.A. McDonald (eds), *Alba. Celtic Scotland in the Medieval Era* (East Linton, 2000), 262.

4 HP, i, 47–50.

5 HP, i, 52.

6 ALI, nos. 119, 121; A. Cameron, 'The Book of Clanranald' in *Reliquiae Celticae: texts papers and studies in Gaelic literature and philology* (eds), A. MacBain and J. Kennedy (Inverness, 1892–94), vol. ii, 163; HP, i, 51–52. Angus had his throat cut while he slept.

7 HP, i, 52; N. Macdougall, *James IV* (Edinburgh 1989), 100–101.

8 ALI, lxx–lxxi, lxxiv–lxxviii, no. 75; R.J. Tanner, *The Late Medieval Scottish Parliament: Politics and the Three Estates, 1424–1488* (East Linton, 2001), 27–28, 44–45, 131–132, 160–163, 210–212.

structures to deal with events in the region; specifically the Campbell earls of Argyll and the Gordon earls of Huntly. Thus the inconsistent and ultimately ineffective policy on the part of crown contributed to the general malaise that existed post-forfeiture and ensured the repercussions lasted much longer than initial spontaneous uprisings.

The widespread discontent in the Isles was further heightened by a real sense of dislocation. Following the death of Angus Óg, it was unclear where authority within the lordship lay. John appeared ever more the lame duck as he submitted to the crown, while Alexander MacDonald of Lochalsh, cousin of Angus Óg, came to assume greater prominence within the clan.⁹ But, regardless of how ineffectual John was as lord and chief, his grandson would become a significant figure in the western Isles. Donald Dubh was the product of the marriage of Angus Óg and Isabella, daughter of Colin Campbell, first earl of Argyll. Following the death of Angus Óg, Argyll took Isabella back into his care at which time she was either pregnant or Donald was only a few months old.¹⁰ Although often perceived to have been a period of imprisonment, Argyll's relationship to his grandson at this time should be regarded as one of guardianship.¹¹ Nonetheless, despite his kin credentials, there was no escaping the fact

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- 9 *ALI*, nos. 122–124; *AU*, iii, 383; K.A. Steer and J.W.M. Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture in the West Highlands* (RCAHMS, 1977), 207. Alexander of Lochalsh is referred to as MacDonald's deputy and in 1492 he is found granting a charter along with John. More significantly, three days earlier 'Alexander of the Isles of Lochalsh' granted lands within the lordship of Lochalsh and the lordship of Lochcarron to the chief of the Clan Cameron 'with the consent of his council', much as Angus Óg had done a few years earlier. John began to toe the royal line following the forfeiture of 1493, and later received a pension from the crown. He died at Dundee in 1503. See *TA*, i, 233, 235, 266, 308; ii, 301, 344, 354, 357; *ER*, x, lix; xi, 123.
- 10 'Book of Clanranald', 163 and *ALI*, lxxii suggest Isabella was pregnant at the time. *HP*, i, 50 says that Donald Dubh was three years old when taken into Argyll's 'custody'. In *L&P Henry VIII*, xx, II, no.40, Donald himself later states in a letter to Henry VIII that while 'in his mother's womb [he] was carried off to captivity and almost until this time has been kept in prison and fetters'. See *L&P Henry VIII*, xx, II, no.294 (135) where the Islesmen assert that Donald, 'the earl of Ross our master, now the king's subject, lay in prison before he was born'. For Campbell marriage policy and reasons why Argyll acted in this way see A Cathcart, 'Inressing of kyndnes and renewing off thair blud': the family, kinship and clan policy in the sixteenth century Scottish Highlands' in E. Ewen and J. Nugent (eds), *Finding the Family in Medieval and Early Modern Scotland* (Aldershot, 2008), 127–138, especially 134–136 and 135 n.34.
- 11 *L&P Henry VIII*, xx, II, 40, 198, 294. Despite mentioning his imprisonment on several occasions during which time he asserts Argyll took his possessions from him, Donald never accuses Argyll of having been his captor.

that Donald was a minor. With no authoritative leadership in the Isles following the forfeiture, and as individual chiefs now moved to gain crown title to their lands, discontent and dislocation soon materialised in festering grievances and bitter rivalries. The inability of the crown to deal with the situation it had created resulted in more risings by individuals who sought to exploit the widespread discontent for their own ends.

A few months after the 1493 forfeiture James IV undertook a naval expedition to the Isles to assert royal authority in the region. Alexander of Lochalsh and John MacDonald of Dunivaig and the Glens submitted to the king but Alexander was soon in open rebellion.¹² Although hard to disentangle from issues relating to the lordship, the rebellion may have been prompted by personal, familial matters. Kenneth Mackenzie, son and heir of Alexander, seventh of Kintail, married Finvola, daughter of Celestine of the Isles, niece of John, 4th Lord, around 1465.¹³ At some point between 1480 and 1490 Mackenzie 'uncourteously' divorced his wife albeit after the birth of a son, and remarried Ann, daughter of Hugh Fraser, third of Lovat.¹⁴ Lochalsh's attack, therefore, may have aimed at 'the destruction of Kintail' as revenge for Mackenzie's treatment of his MacDonald wife.¹⁵ While the Mackenzies had maintained close relations with the Lords of the Isles prior to 1476, after the 1493 forfeiture they began to distance themselves from the MacDonalds, seeking rehabilitation with the crown. It was a successful policy making gains in Ross, albeit a move clearly resented by the MacDonalds who regarded the

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- 12 *ER*, x, lxi; D.H. Caldwell, *Islay: the land of the lordship* (Edinburgh, 2008), 69. On this occasion both were said to have been knighted and Alexander received a promise that all freeholders in the isles would be infeft in their lands. D. Gregory, *History of the Western Highlands and Isles of Scotland, 1493–1625* (Edinburgh, 1836), 92, postures the rebellion was either an attempt to regain Ross, or an attempt to revenge his earlier defeat at the hands of the Mackenzies during the battle of Blair na Parc in 1491. It is possible this attack by Alexander is the Battle of Park referred to in the oral accounts. According to *HP*, i, 55–56; 'Book of Clanranald', 165, Alexander is said to have led a devastating raid on Inverness in 1491 but subsequently suffered a defeat at the hands of the Mackenzies during the battle of Blair na Parc. A.J. Haddow, *The History and Structure of Ceol Mor* (Glasgow, 1982), 32 argues there is musical and oral evidence for a battle at Park which he suggests occurred in 1488 rather than 1491, although here Haddow follows the argument taken by A. Mackenzie, *History of the MacDonalds and Lords of the Isles* (Inverness, 1881).
 - 13 *ALI*, B 42. Marriage dispensation dated 13 September 1465. Most later sources confuse this stating it was Margaret, a daughter of John, who married Kenneth Mackenzie.
 - 14 Highland Regional Archives [hereafter HRA] D225/B4/a, MS 'History of the Clan Mackenzie' by the Western Clans of Deasaich, n.d., f 51; Gregory, *History*, 83. This was a more politically-acceptable connection, especially in the wake of the forfeiture of 1476.
 - 15 HRA, D225/B4/a. f 48.

earldom as an integral part of the lordship.¹⁶ Lochalsh's rising, however, was quickly suppressed by the Mackenzies, a defeat which was said to have 'lost the MacDonalds their supremacy in Ross for ever'.¹⁷

Although Alexander was killed in the immediate aftermath while trying to gather more forces, it was his son, Donald of Lochalsh, who raised rebellion in the west in 1513 taking full advantage of the vulnerability of the political elite following the defeat at Flodden.¹⁸ Donald had been present at the battle, where he was knighted, but on returning to his estates he sought to exploit the political situation and gathered momentum for a rising aimed at restoration of the lordship.¹⁹ There is said to have been two rebellions, one from 1513 to 1515, and another from 1516 to 1519.²⁰ Little is known of either but in this action Lochalsh was joined by Alexander MacDonald of Dunivaig and the Glens in an insurrection aimed directly at John MacIain of Ardnamurchan.²¹ MacIain had been

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- 16 Steer and Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture*, 205 suggest the Lords of the Isles had been opposed consistently by the Mackenzies since 1411. For a detailed assessment of MacDonald-Mackenzie relations see A. MacCoinnich, 'Kingis rabellis' to 'Cuidich 'n Righ'? Clann Choinnich: the emergence of a kindred, c.1475–c.1514' in S. Boardman and A. Ross (eds), *The Exercise of Power in Medieval Scotland c.1200–1500* (Dublin, 2003), 175–200. The significance of Ross had been clearly conveyed to the island clans through the actions of previous lords. Alexander, third Lord of the Isles, had 'lived as Earl of Ross rather than as Lord of the Isles' while John, 4th Lord, also concentrated on securing the earldom to the detriment, and ultimate loss, of the lordship. It was a region that proved economically advantageous to the island lords but it also ensured that, as earls of Ross, they were regarded as important magnates within Scotland no longer confined to the western periphery. Indeed, economic reasons are paramount when explaining why James III forfeited the earldom in 1476. See Steer and Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture*, 207; J. Munro, 'The Lordship of the Isles' in L. Maclean (ed.), *The Making of the Middle Ages in the Highlands* (Inverness, 1981), 29; MacDougall, 'Achilles' Heel?', 255, 257, 275.
- 17 HRA, D286 Mackenzie of Portmore; *HP*, i, 55–56; *Collectanea de Rebus Albanicis: consisting of original papers and documents relating to the history of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* (eds), D. Gregory and W.F. Skene (Edinburgh, 1847), 321.
- 18 Gregory, *Western Highlands and Isles*, 106, 113–126. Following the death of his father, Donald had been taken into the custody of the king himself and apparently became a great favourite of James IV. On account of this friendship, and in the hope that Donald would provide a stabilizing influence in the west, James allowed him to inherit his father's estates, despite the fact that Alexander of Lochalsh was killed while in rebellion.
- 19 *ER*, xiv, cxxvii–cxxviii, 55, refers to 'the rebels of the Isles, who were attempting to establish the title of Sir Donald of Lochaber as Lord of the Isles'.
- 20 'Book of Clanranald', 164–165.
- 21 'Book of Clanranald', 165 states that Lochalsh and Dunivaig had conspired to divide the isles between them with Dunivaig having dominion south of Ardnamurchan. Such an aim

responsible for the deaths of the fathers of both Lochalsh and Dunivaig and, on account of his policy of co-operation with the crown, had made gains at their expense. They took the opportunity to extract revenge under the guise of lordship restoration.²² When it became clear that Lochalsh had a personal agenda, Dunivaig and others, including Lachlan MacLean of Duart, soon turned from open rebellion to self-preservation. In March 1516–17 they petitioned government, arguing Lochalsh had told them he was acting with the authority of the Governor, John Stewart, 4th duke of Albany. Instead, Lochalsh ‘showed “in word and deid” that he was “wylfull to dystrow the said landis [of the Isles] and the kingis legis the inhabitouris of thaim be slachter, herschip, fyr and commone opressione eftir his puer” and would not take counsel’.²³ Dunivaig, MacLean and John MacLean of Lochbuie asked for a remission of their crimes and a grant of lands that belonged to their respective clan estates. In return they would be “leile and trew to the kingis graice, my lord governour and to the realme...and assist supple and help Colyne erle of Ergile, lieuetenant of the Ylis” who the government turned to in order to deal with the situation in the west and who restored stability relatively quickly through negotiation.²⁴ While the islanders were ready to join together in rebellion under the banner of lordship restoration, when this failed they were just as quick to preserve their own individual position and submit to central authority.²⁵

is somewhat unrealistic. It is more likely that the two men wanted to regain land lost to them after the forfeiture. See Caldwell, *Islay*, 78.

22 *HP*, i, 60–61; ‘Book of Clanranald’, 163–165; *TA*, i, 238–239; Steer and Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture*, 210; Caldwell, *Islay*, 70–71, 79. MacIain sought and gained crown favour after the forfeiture and delivered John MacDonald of Dunivaig and three of his sons, wanted for treason, to Edinburgh where they were executed. It was for this act that Alexander MacDonald, only surviving son of John, wanted revenge. The personal feud between the two families came to an end through the marriage of MacDonald to Catherine, a daughter of MacIain, although this occurred after MacIain himself had died, probably sometime in the late 1520s.

23 *ADCP*, 87.

24 *ADCP*, 78, 87–89; *RSS*, i, no 2871; *ALI*, no. 113; A. 52; J Cameron, *James V: the personal rule 1528–1542* (East Linton, 1998), 240. In 1478 Colin, 1st earl, had witnessed a charter of John, fourth Lord, while the earl’s daughters married into the MacDonalds and the MacLeods of Lewis. A daughter of Archibald, 2nd earl, married MacIain of Ardnamurchan. For MacIain, a marriage alliance with the house of Argyll facilitated access to crown favour while Argyll could rely on MacIain’s assistance in prosecuting crown commissions in the Highlands.

25 N. Maclean-Bristol, *Warriors and Priests: the history of Clan Maclean 1300–1570* (East Linton, 1995), 84–86 argues Lachlan MacLean of Duart initially joined the rebellion,

Alexander MacDonald of Dunivaig and the Glens rebelled again in 1529, the result of a local, personal dispute with Archibald, 4th earl of Argyll, concerning the MacIain inheritance during which MacDonald, along with MacLean of Duart, attacked Campbell lands.²⁶ In the light of plans for a royal expedition to the isles to deal with him, Alexander MacDonald wrote to the king reinforcing the desire of the Islesmen to be 'trew and obedient liegis'.²⁷ As a result, instead of taking action against him, James V attempted to forge closer relations with Alexander of Dunivaig and the Glens, relying on him to establish order in the region. This came at the expense of the earl of Argyll who was deprived, albeit temporarily, of the hereditary office of chamberlain of Kintyre.²⁸ Crown-clan co-operation at this time brought only a temporary relief to unrest, ending when MacDonald died in 1536. However, crown intervention in the isles did not return until 1539 when another rebellion broke out that contained elements of both personal and MacDonald grievance but proclaimed lordship restoration as its aim. Donald Gorm MacDonald of Sleat wasted Trotternish in Skye, formerly part of the earldom of Ross but, post-forfeiture was the focus of a dispute between Sleat and the MacLeods of Dunvegan and Harris, both of whom laid claim to it. Having attacked the MacLeods and hoping to capitalise on his success, Sleat made his way to Ross. This was a logical step considering geographic proximity but it was opportunistic too as Mackenzie of Kintail was absent from his lands at that time. Although Sleat laid waste to the lands of Kinlochewe, thereby taking revenge on the Mackenzies who had made further gains in Ross, he was killed in his attempt to take Eilean Donan castle.²⁹

seeing the opportunity of furthering his own claims in the isles. He took Cairnbulg Castle in Mull, granted recently to Argyll, and shortly afterwards also took the castle of Dunskaith in Sleat with the help of his brother-in-law, Alexander MacLeod of Dunvegan. When the real aims of the rebellion were uncovered the two men abandoned the cause and submitted to Argyll.

26 *ADCP*, 326–327, 340; *RSS*, i, 3048; Cameron, *James V*, 240–241.

27 *ADCP*, 342, 353.

28 *ADCP*, 356–358. For further details of this see A. Cathcart, 'James V, King of Scotland – and Ireland?' in S. Duffy (ed.), *The world of the galloglass. Kings, warlords and warriors in Ireland and Scotland, 1200–1600* (Dublin, 2007), 127–128; Caldwell, *Islay*, 80. Cameron, *James V*, 232–239, argues that although Argyll may have lost the office of chamberlain of Kintyre he was still the most influential magnate in the Isles. The king's treatment of the earl has been interpreted in various ways but he may have been trying to ensure greater financial returns as neither Archibald nor his father, Colin, 3rd earl, had been successful in their execution of this post.

29 HRA, D225/B4/a, f.59; Gregory, *Western Highlands and Isles*, 143–146.

These rebellions commanded attention in the short-term but they did not pose long-term threats to royal authority or the stability of Scotland as a whole. Most used the appeal of lordship restoration to gain support within the Isles but when real objectives were discovered, or when the main protagonist died, this dwindled. Once individuals chiefs realised the rising was doomed, personal agendas came to the fore and they quickly submitted to the crown in order to protect their own interests. Taken together, the risings indicate the level of unrest in the Isles and the tensions within Clan Donald during the first half of the sixteenth century, but they also emphasise the mix of personal, local and lordship agendas at play in the Isles. Dissent within the Clan Donald was evident, as was inter-clan feuding amongst former lordship clans. This was exacerbated by crown policy which was inconsistent and sporadic. While direct intervention in the region did occur, for the most part governance of the west was delegated to regional magnates.

The Island Battleground: Argyll-Huntly Rivalry

The main agents of the crown during this period were the earls of Huntly and the earls of Argyll. Both sought to advance their position at court while extending their influence through the Isles, the west and central Highlands. Thus during the early sixteenth century the Isles became the arena where the power struggle between successive earls of Argyll and Huntly was played out. At the turn of the century each had a very different relationship with the island clans. Colin, 1st earl of Argyll, was a Gaelic chief aware of his responsibilities to his clansmen and proud of his ability to fulfil them. The Gaelic culture fostered in the west by the Campbells of Argyll and the Clan Donald complimented and enhanced each other, although successive earls of Argyll were considerably more adept at simultaneously maintaining respectability as Lowland magnates.³⁰ Indeed, Argyll's position at court depended a great deal on his government of the West and it was his ability to deliver Highland stability that was relied on to an ever increasing degree during the sixteenth century, a time when crown and Lowland society in general were more aware of, and concerned with, Highland lawlessness. But this did not necessarily lead to a weakening of alliances with island families. The Campbells of Argyll had co-existed

30 J. Dawson, 'The Fifth Earl of Argyll, Gaelic Lordship and Political Power in Sixteenth Century Scotland', *SHR*, 183 (1988), 1–27; J.E.A. Dawson, *The Fifth Earl of Argyll and the Struggle for Britain and Ireland. The Politics of Religion in the Age of Mary, Queen of Scots* (Cambridge, 2002), 48–83.

easily with the Clan Donald (and other lordship clans) for centuries and, in contrast to seventeenth-century relations which colours much subsequent historiography of the Highlands, at the turn of the sixteenth century the two clans were on friendly terms and closely connected.³¹

Given these ties with neighbouring clans, it is not clear how the island kindreds viewed Argyll's custody of Donald Dubh. There does not appear to have been any visible signs of hostile opposition to the earl during these early years nor any spontaneous attempts to release the young heir from his confinement. While oral tradition highlights that it coincided with a period of great unrest in the isles this was more likely the result of inter-clan rivalry in the wake of the forfeiture than a reaction to Argyll's actions.³² While ambitious individuals, such as John MacIain of Ardnamurchan, tried to exploit the post-forfeiture dislocation in the Isles for their own benefit thereby heightening local feuding, Argyll's custody of Donald Dubh ensured he would not fall prey to a rival claimant for the lordship.³³ It is unlikely to have been a harsh captivity for the young boy, although what Argyll's main motive was remains in doubt: genuine concern for his grandson, or a more selfish concern for his own, and wider Campbell, interests?³⁴ Certainly this guardianship gave him considerable bargaining power on two fronts: with the island clans and with the crown. Indeed, Argyll used these relations with neighbouring clans to his own advantage and, on a couple of occasions, emphasised to both crown and government that negotiation through him, rather than force, was the most effective means of dealing with the west.³⁵

31 Caldwell, *Islay*, 77; and see note 24 above. By mid-century the house of Argyll had contracted marriages with the MacLeans of Duart and the MacDonalds of Dunivaig and the Glens. However, compare the anti-Campbell perspective of A.J. and A. MacDonald, *The Clan Donald*, 3 vols (Inverness, 1896–1904), and see i, 289–290, 298–299 as an example of Campbell 'manipulation'. For a concise exploration of the historiography see S. Boardman, *The Campbells 1250–1513* (Edinburgh, 2006), 1–8.

32 'Book of Clanranald', 163–167; *HP*, i, 47–64.

33 Both 'Book of Clanranald' and 'History of the MacDonalds' implicitly portray this era of upheaval as one where rival claims for the position of 'Lord of the Isles' were put forward by a number of Islesmen.

34 Caldwell, *Islay*, 77, and n.10 above.

35 During the early part of the sixteenth century successive earls of Argyll continued to build up connections with neighbouring clans in the region. See J. Wormald, *Lords and Men in Scotland: bonds of manrent 1442–1603* (Edinburgh, 1985), App. A, 179, no. 8; *The Book of the Thaness of Cawdor. A Series of Papers Selected from the Charter Room at Cawdor 1236–1742* (ed.), C. Innes (Edinburgh, 1859), 123–124, 128, 129, 131, 133–135, 135, 136–137, 137–138, 138–139, 139–140, 140–141, 144–145, 145–146; Steer & Bannerman,

Argyll's position in and policy towards the region stood in marked contrast to that of Huntly. Like the Campbells of Argyll, the Gordons of Huntly had experienced a steady rise to power following the creation of the earldom in 1445. Although their power base was in the northeast of Scotland, Gordon influence extended throughout Badenoch and Lochaber and the crown came to rely on the earls to deal with affairs in the north Highlands and Isles. Nonetheless, it was Alexander, 3rd earl, who most acutely recognised the opportunities that the weakened lordship and emerging power vacuum in the central Highland region provided. He sought to extend the Gordon power base north and west while at the same time implement crown policy against the MacDonalds.³⁶ But the burgeoning role of the house of Gordon in island affairs did not go unnoticed by Argyll. In 1495 Archibald, 2nd earl of Argyll, was created Master of the Household, while the 2nd earl of Huntly's appointment as Chancellor in 1497 ensured that rivalry between the two would be played out at court and in the west. Over the following years the crown granted commissions to deal with the situation in the west Highlands and Isles to both men but divided the region between them, relying on Huntly in the North Isles and Argyll in the South Isles.³⁷

The contrast between the methods employed by the earls in executing such commissions was evident during James IV's expedition to the Isles in 1494. While Alexander, Master of Gordon, who would pursue the MacDonalds with vigour, accompanied the king, Argyll was noticeably absent. No doubt he was reluctant to jeopardise his position within the Isles by appearing so blatantly with the crown immediately after the forfeiture.³⁸ This may have won Argyll little favour with the crown, but he was able to manipulate his relations with the island clans to his own advantage and did so early in the sixteenth century to great success. This was evident in his custody of Donald and in 1517 when Argyll asked that 'he may schaw to the men of the Ylis that he has the kingis puer to rasayf the men of the Ylis that wyll cum to be kingis gud legis and...that he may sauffle promyt to get tham thar ramissionis of all crimis by past'.³⁹ The three Highland chiefs, MacDonald of Dunivaig and the Glens, MacLean of Duart and MacLean of Coll submitted promising 'to be leyle treow servandis'

Monumental Sculpture, 211–212; J. Dawson, "'There is Nothing Like a Good Gossip': Baptism, Kinship and Alliance in Early Modern Scotland", *Review of Scottish Culture*, 15 (2002), 88–95, at 91; Cameron, *James V*, 228.

36 Macdougall, *James IV*, 178–179.

37 For these various commissions see *RSS*, i, 413, 513, 520, 722–723.

38 MacDougall, 'Achilles' Heel?', 266.

39 *ADCP*, 79–80, 89–90.

to the earl 'als lang as our gowernyng is dyrektyt tyll hym with all our puer, men, kyn and frendis be sey and be land'.⁴⁰ Their offer to work with the earl allowed Argyll to present the case that he was indispensable in the west and the earl's lieutenancy of the Isles was extended to encompass Lochaber, although the parts under the jurisdiction of the earl of Huntly were excepted as were the islands of Bute and Arran.⁴¹

The crown's continued reliance on Huntly must have infuriated Argyll but, as time went on, he had to contend with other issues that threatened to jeopardise his position. The 1520s saw local and personal disputes escalate into feuds resulting in attacks on Campbell lands by Alexander MacDonald of Dunivaig and the Glens and Lachlan MacLean of Duart.⁴² These were an expression of the growing resentment towards Argyll and the wider Campbell kindred on account of its increased intervention in the west. Until this time, island aggression had been focused largely on the house of Huntly but the steady consolidation of Argyll's position, heightened hostility. By the mid-sixteenth century this was embodied in the personal animosity shown towards the 4th earl in 1545 by Donald Dubh, heir to the forfeited lordship. Indeed, the grievance articulated towards Argyll in 1545 contrasts sharply with the earl's role in the 1st Donald Dubh rebellion that broke out in the early years of the sixteenth century.

The Rebellions of Donald Dubh

Between 1488 and 1504 there were no less than five revocations.⁴³ One of the early victims of this policy was Torquil MacLeod of Lewis who, in 1498, had received a grant of the office of bailiary of Trotternish with the lands of Duntulm and 'Ardvethfullane' belonging to that office in Skye that had been in crown hands since the forfeiture of 1493. According to the terms of the grant, both office and lands were to be held by Torquil and his heirs by Katherine, daughter of Colin, 1st earl of Argyll.⁴⁴ This was revoked shortly afterwards and

40 RSS, i, no. 2851, 2876–8; ADCP, 87.

41 RSS, i, no. 2873; Gregory, *Western Highlands and Isles*, 115–121.

42 A daughter of Archibald, 2nd earl of Argyll, and sister to the 3rd earl, had married Maclean. It had not been a happy union and Maclean had attempted to drown her. In retaliation John Campbell of Cawdor, brother to the 3rd earl, murdered Maclean 'in his bed, wnder silence of nicht' while in Edinburgh. For further details of this incident see Gregory, *Western Highlands and Isles*, 128; MacDonald, *Clan Donald*, i, 335–337; *Thanes of Cawdor*, 146–147.

43 APS, ii, 236–237, c.22; 240; TA, i, 383.

44 ALI, A 52; RMS, ii, no. 2424.

MacLeod's grievance at this turn of events was manipulated in the first rebellion of Donald Dubh. In 1501 Argyll released the young Donald Dubh who made straight for MacLeod, suggesting Donald had a clear agenda.⁴⁵ But it was not just MacLeod who harboured resentment towards the king. The forfeitures, revocations and subsequent regrants of land had deepened the divisions between the various branches of the Clan Donald and other lordship clans, with individual chiefs vying with each other over land and position. Coupled with James IV's fortifications and establishment of royal garrisons around the coasts, there was general discontent.⁴⁶

The atmosphere within the Isles was ripe for rebellion and the majority of the Islesmen united behind Donald Dubh, attacking royal lands on Bute in 1502 with widespread disorder prevalent throughout the region by the following year. In response Huntly wasted no time in taking military action, using his commission to pursue his vendetta against the MacDonalds in 1504 and in 1506.⁴⁷ But despite action taken by the crown and the ultimate success of Huntly's expeditions into the Isles, the rebellion of Donald Dubh required three government campaigns to suppress it while Donald himself was at large for six years before being imprisoned in Edinburgh Castle in 1506.⁴⁸ Unfortunately for Argyll his action in releasing Donald had not produced the desired result. The balance of power in the west remained unaltered while in 1509 Huntly was given the custody of Inverness Castle and made hereditary sheriff of Inverness, an office which enhanced the bounds of his jurisdiction as it extended over the shires of Inverness, Ross and Caithness.⁴⁹ Although rebellion had been suppressed and Donald Dubh imprisoned, this did not bring an

45 MacDougall, 'Achilles' Heel?', 271, argues it was MacLeod himself who sought the restoration of the lordship at this time. He feared Huntly's 1501 commission of lieutenancy which would be executed forcefully and, as it covered the North Isles, would affect him directly. Argyll, meanwhile, regarded the release of Donald Dubh as 'a means of checking the growing power of his rival Huntly'. See also Caldwell, *Islay*, 77.

46 A. Cathcart, 'The Forgotten '45?: Donald Dubh's rebellion in an archipelagic context', *SHR*, xci:2, no. 232 (October, 2012), 245 and 245 n.31.

47 *RSS*, i, no. 792; *The Records of Aboyne MCCXXX-MDCLXXXI* (ed.), C. Gordon (Aberdeen, 1894), 418.

48 Gregory, *Western Highlands and Isles*, 102; Cameron, *James V*, 228. Donald was imprisoned in 1506 and his yearly expenses totalled £40. In general most texts are vague as to the year of Donald's imprisonment. *TA*, iii, lxxxii is mistaken when asserting that Donald was imprisoned in Stirling Castle because of a payment on 28 August 1507 of £17 for 'expenss of clathes' to Donald of the Isles, as this was Donald of Lochalsh not Donald Dubh. *TA*, v, 237 shows Donald still in prison in 1524.

49 *RMS*, ii, no. 3286.

end to the social and economic dislocation faced by the island clans. Indeed, such issues were as much at the forefront of the 1545 rebellion as political concerns.

The grievances of the Islesmen found their fullest expression in the rebellion that broke out in the Isles in 1545.⁵⁰ The 1540 Act of Annexation of lordship lands to the crown and the survey that came in its wake resulted in a significant rental increase for many in the Isles. This had been preceded by legislation to ensure the observance of Scots Law in the region and ongoing royal intervention through successive earls of Argyll and Huntly.⁵¹ The Islesmen who signed the agreement reached with Henry VIII of England at Carrickfergus in 1545 were a disaffected, yet opportunistic, 'political community'.⁵² They exploited the absence of an adult monarch on the throne, expressing their grievances at a time when, so the Islesmen argued, their actions did not constitute a rebellion against the Scottish crown.⁵³ Regardless of how they justified it, the rising was a blatant exploitation of the wider context by all parties involved.

Following the death of James V in 1542 and the repudiation of the Treaties of Greenwich in 1543 Scotland and England were at war. In his effort to force the Scots into accepting Anglo-Scottish union, to be realised through the marriage of Mary Stewart and Edward Tudor, Henry VIII's son, Henry utilised collaboration alongside military force. He relied on 'assured' lords, Scots captured at Solway Moss in 1542 and imprisoned in England, released in order to work towards dynastic union once back in Scotland. He relied also on Matthew Stewart, earl of Lennox. Lennox had been enticed back to Scotland from France by the emerging anti-English faction in Scotland but he soon became superfluous to their requirements. With little purpose to serve in Scotland and little effort made to secure his continued co-operation, a disgruntled Lennox entered the service of the English king. In June 1544 he agreed to hand over Dumbarton Castle and the Isle of Bute to the English king, relinquish 'all title he [Lennox] pretends to the Crown of Scotland', and acknowledge Henry as 'supreme sovereign and governor of Scotland'. In return Henry granted Lennox the marriage of Margaret Douglas, the king's niece, and agreed that when

50 For a fuller discussion of the 1545 rebellion see Cathcart, 'The Forgotten '45?', 239–264.

51 Discontent with the emphasis on Scots Law may explain why Patrick MacLean was designated 'high justiciar of the Isles' in a communication with Henry VIII of August 1545. See Steve Boardman, 'The lost world: post-medieval accounts of the lordship of the Isles' in S. Duffy and S. Foran (eds), *The English Isles: cultural transmission and political conflict in Britain and Ireland, 1100–1500* (Dublin, 2013), 159–160 and 159 n.25.

52 Boardman, 'The lost world', 161.

53 Cathcart, 'Forgotten '45', 260–261.

Henry gained 'the direction and rule of Scotland' Lennox would be appointed governor.⁵⁴ Henry wanted Dumbarton and Bute for strategic reasons, but delivering the castle proved difficult for Lennox who led a failed attack in August 1544, although he did manage to cause havoc along the shore of the Clyde.⁵⁵ With the anti-English party in Scotland gaining ground, Henry needed to instigate plans which required greater military effort. He found allies in the unsettled Highlands and Islands and the recently-liberated Donald Dubh.

By 1 March 1545 Henry's negotiations with Donald Dubh and the Islesmen were much advanced.⁵⁶ At this time Donald was in strong position and taking revenge on the earl of Argyll, while Huntly faced difficulties in his own lands in the central Highlands.⁵⁷ The two earls, preparing for war against Henry on the Borders, were unable to deal with unrest on their estates at the same time and agreed a truce with Donald sometime between mid-March and 1 May 1545.⁵⁸ Truce or no truce, communication between the Islesmen and Henry continued. A commission drawn up in the Isles on 28 July 1545 included the names of most of the island chiefs.⁵⁹ The document stated that Donald Dubh, styled as 'Lord of ye Ilis and Erll of Roiss', with the 'adviss and consent of our barronis and counsaill of ye Ilis' elected two plenipotentiaries to negotiate with Henry.⁶⁰ The English hoped to use the Islesmen to occupy Argyll and Huntly in their respective localities, thereby preventing either earl from deploying his full military capability on the border.⁶¹ Eight days later the island chiefs, with a force

54 *L&P Henry VIII*, xix, I, nos. 337, 779 (477); *SP Henry VIII*, v, no. 385–389.

55 *SP Henry VIII*, v, no. 395–396; *Hamilton Papers*, ii, no. 317; Donaldson, *Scotland: James V-James VII*, 70.

56 *Hamilton Papers*, ii, nos. 414 (562), 416; *L&P Henry VIII*, xx, I, no. 347, 348.

57 *Hamilton Papers*, ii, no. 426 (581–582); *Records of Aboyne*, 441–446; Gregory, *Western Highlands and Isles*, 157–161. There was clan feuding in the central and eastern Highlands, the area over which Huntly had jurisdiction. While Huntly made efforts to deal with this unrest, he had to leave the discontent to simmer when needed in the south.

58 *Hamilton Papers*, ii, nos. 428 (583), 432; *L&P Henry VIII*, xx, I, 664.

59 Those missing were James MacDonald of Dunivaig and the Glens, Torquil MacNeill of Gigha (then an old man), and his son, Niall. For more details see Cathcart, 'Forgotten '45', 256 and 256 n.101–102.

60 *L&P Henry VIII*, xx, I, no. 1298. They were Ruari MacAllaster, brother of the captain of Clanranald, Dean of Morvern, and Patrick MacLean, brother of MacLean of Duart, described as 'bailze of Ycomkill and justice clerk of the South Isles'.

61 *L&P Henry VIII*, xx, I, no. 642, 2 May 1545, refers to 'the earl of the Ellis' who will keep Huntly and Argyll 'occupied'. According to xx, I, no. 1106 (544), 4 July 1545, the English suggested sending 3–4000 men to aid the Islesmen who were to occupy Huntly and Argyll otherwise a large army would be needed to go to the Borders 'for all Scotland will be there by reason of encouragements of the Frenchmen'.

of 4000 Scots, were at Carrickfergus on the east Antrim coast, a place 'more propice for them to serve the King against the Scots than any port in their own land'.⁶² Here they swore an oath of allegiance to Henry and throughout the rest of August and September the finer details of the agreement were honed.

In the light of the devastation caused by the English forces in the south and east of the country, this alliance of the Islesmen with Henry had the potential to cause havoc for Scotland. However, in the end it was disagreement amongst the Highlanders and Islesmen themselves over payment that led to its collapse. After the arrival of the Islesmen at Carrickfergus Lennox, who was needed on the Borders, was recalled. With the expedition postponed Donald Dubh and his forces returned to Scotland to keep a closer eye on events in their own lands. By this stage their concerns about money were pre-eminent and resulted in conflict. Hector MacLean, having taken on the hereditary role of steward of the Isles, had the responsibility of distributing the funds already given by Henry, but this was not done 'to the satisfaction of all' and following the outbreak of internal dissension the force disbanded.⁶³ The proposed rebellion descended into internal petty squabbles, contrasting sharply with its somewhat lofty aims. Donald Dubh went back to Ireland where he is said to have attempted to amass another force to continue with the plan, but he died at Drogheda 'of a fever of five nights'.⁶⁴

Conclusion

The period between 1493 and 1545 saw a decisive shift in the balance of power and authority in the west. The forfeiture of 1493 and subsequent legislation curtailed MacDonald influence in the west and ensured the decades following were turbulent for the Clan Donald and former lordship clans. The fissures of dissent evident at the end of the fifteenth century were exacerbated by an ineffective and inconsistent crown policy which lurched from one strategy to another, sending mixed messages. In the wake of the forfeiture James IV saw the need to establish something of a buffer between Lowland Scotland and the western Highlands and Isles, and set about restricting MacDonald influence to

62 *L&P Henry VIII*, xx, II, no. 121. Carrickfergus was well known to the Scots and only a short sail across the North Channel.

63 'Book of Clanranald', ii, 167.

64 'The Book of Clanranald', 167, states that he left no child. However, Gregory, *Western Highlands and Isles*, 176–177; MacDonald, *Clan Donald*, i, 386 suggest that he left an illegitimate son in the care of Henry.

the western seaboard while establishing loyal clans in the central and eastern Highlands, a policy his son and successor, James V, also followed.⁶⁵ Both kings relied, to varying degrees, on successive earls of Argyll and Huntly and delegated to them responsibility for law and order. Numerous commissions of lieutenancy to these earls resulted in the extension of Gordon and Campbell authority in the west, at the expense of the Clan Donald.⁶⁶ A cursory glance at affairs in the west in the early sixteenth century would suggest that 1493 was an end point; the final nail in the coffin of MacDonald power.

A more detailed analysis, however, highlights a nuance that points to a different reading of events. Although the rebellions that occurred in the west were an indicator of the extent of unrest and discontent that prevailed in the wake of the forfeiture this period should not be regarded as one where the crown triumphed over lawless, Highland subjects. Unquestionably the lordship came to an end with the 1493 forfeiture and while genuine efforts to restore it were doomed, this does not mean the MacDonalds, as a force in the West, were finished. The clan was divided by policy and weakened by internal dissent, but Clan Donald influence in the west continued. Indeed, both James IV and James V showed themselves willing to work with the MacDonalds. When, for example, James V looked to Alexander MacDonald of Dunivaig and the Glens to secure peace and stability in the west it was recognition of the enduring power the clan held within the region. The death of Donald Dubh in 1545 may have left the Islesmen bereft of a focal point for their discontent and heightened a prevailing sense of dislocation. But throughout the second half of the sixteenth century Scottish monarchs would turn time and again to the MacDonalds as the prevailing political force in the West, regardless of the expansive influence of the Campbells of Argyll.

The death of Donald Dubh following the abortive 1545 rising did not bring an end to aspirations of lordship restoration, but neither did it bring an end to Clan Donald power in Scotland.⁶⁷ Indeed, in the latter half of the sixteenth century the MacDonalds of Dunivaig and the Glens remained political players in both Scotland and Ireland.⁶⁸ The establishment of a branch of the Clan

65 This was not a new initiative as James II had following a similar policy in the mid-fifteenth century. See Cathcart, *Kinship and Clientage*, 40–56.

66 And also the expansion of the Mackenzies of Kintail.

67 A. MacCoinnich, “His spirit was given only to warre”: conflict and identity in the Scottish *Gáidhealtachd*, c.1580–c.1630’ in S. Murdoch and A. Mackillop (eds), *Fighting for Identity: Scottish Military Experience, c.1550–1900* (Leiden, 2002), 147–148 shows that claims to the lordship by other branches of the MacDonalds continued into the mid-seventeenth century.

68 There is not the space here to explore the ongoing political influence of other branches of the Clan Donald such as MacDonalds of Sleat, the Clanrannald, or the MacDonnells of Glenarry.

Donald in the Glens of Antrim at the turn of the fifteenth century had provided something of a safe haven. Following the execution of his father and brothers and the forfeiture of their lands, Alexander of Dunivaig and the Glens took refuge in Ulster until his fortunes in Scotland changed. His marriage to the daughter of MacIain of Ardnamurchan coupled with the period of co-operation between himself and James V brought Alexander to greater prominence in the west. His son, James MacDonald, married Agnes Campbell, daughter of Colin, 3rd earl of Argyll, in 1545 and the same year received a heritable possession of lands in Kintyre he had formerly leased, regranted by the crown as part of the Barony of Bar. He received further lands in Kintyre and Islay in 1562. James' sons, notably Angus and Sorley Boy, remained pivotal figures on either side of the North Channel that neither Scottish nor English monarchs could afford to ignore. Indeed, Elizabeth I formally granted Sorley Boy a patent of denization along with lands in Antrim in 1586 while James VI would turn to Angus MacDonald of Dunivaig and the Glens in his efforts to pacify the west of Scotland.⁶⁹ In 1603 one of the first grants James made as king of three kingdoms was to Randal MacDonnell (MacDonald) of Antrim, signalling the continued role of the MacDonalds throughout the seventeenth century.⁷⁰ In the post-1493 (or post-1545) world the Clan Donald, albeit divided into distinct branches, was neither down nor out.

69 *Calendar of the Carew Manuscripts preserved in the archiepiscopal library at Lambeth, 1515–1624* (eds), J.S. Brewer & W. Bullen, 6 vols (London, 1867–73), ii, nos 611, 614; *RPCS*, vi, 321. At the same time Elizabeth granted lands in the Glens to Angus MacDonald as well. For more on the MacDonalds in Ireland post-1545 see C. Brady, 'The MacDonalds and the provincial strategies of Hugh O'Neill' in W.P. Kelly and J.R. Young (eds), *Scotland and the Ulster Plantations. Explorations in the British Settlements of Stuart Ireland* (Dublin, 2009), 41–61; J.M. Hill, 'The rift within Clan Iain Mhór: the Antrim and Dunyveg MacDonnells, 1590–1603', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 24 (1993), 869–882; J.M. Hill, *Fire and Sword: Sorley Boy MacDonnell and the rise of Clan Iain Mhór, 1538–1590* (London, 1993). For a brief overview of the MacDonalds in Scotland post-1545 see A. Cathcart, 'Scots and Ulster: the late medieval context' in Kelly and Young (eds), *Scotland and the Ulster Plantations*, 62–83.

70 Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Earl Antrim Papers, D2977/5/1/1/1/2; D2977/5/1/1/2/2; *Calendar of Irish Patent Rolls of James I. Facsimile of the Irish Record Commission's Calendar* (Dublin, 1996), 58. For more on the MacDonalds in the seventeenth century see MacDonald, *Clan Donald*, iii; D. Stevenson, *Alasdair MacColla and the Highland Problem in the seventeenth century* (Edinburgh, 1980); J.H. Ohlmeyer, *Civil War and Restoration in the three Stuart kingdoms: the career of Randal MacDonnell, marquis of Antrim, 1609–1683* (Cambridge, 1993).

Castle Tioram and the MacDonalds of Clanranald

*A Western Seaboard Castle in Context*¹

Geoffrey Stell

Situated immediately outside the boundary of the former county of Argyll, whose castles and other monuments were thoroughly recorded in the seven-volume series of RCAHMS *Inventories* published between 1971 and 1992,² Castle Tioram in Moidart had for a long time the unhappy distinction of being one of the least studied of Scotland's western seaboard castles. In a short period following the purchase of the castle by Anta Estates in 1997 that situation was sharply reversed, and it soon stood high among the ranks of minutely observed and recorded castles in the country as a whole.

In 2006 the writer was invited by Historic Scotland, with the support of Anta Estates, to prepare a full statement of cultural significance on Castle Tioram, the third such statement to have been undertaken since 1997. Building upon a series of detailed historical and archaeological studies commissioned by Anta Estates,³ this exercise presented an opportunity to reappraise not only

- 1 The author wishes to record his gratitude to all members of the consultative group with whom he worked on the original report in 2006, especially to Peter Drummond, Athol Murray and John Raven. Others of the group who generously offered expert information and comments included Ted Cowan, Stephen Driscoll, Richard Fawcett, Aonghus MacKechnie and Allan Rutherford. Thanks are also extended to Anthony Dalton, Roger Miket, Marion Roberts, Iain Thornber and Richard Oram, who kindly agreed to a late request to include Castle Tioram in this volume of essays.
- 2 D. MacGibbon and T. Ross, *The Castellated and Domestic Architecture of Scotland*, iii (Edinburgh, 1889), 56–58, and W.D. Simpson, 'Castle Tioram, Moidart, Inverness-shire; and Mingary Castle, Ardnarmurchan, Argyllshire', *Transactions of the Glasgow Archaeological Society*, new series, xiii (1954), 70–90. For summary descriptions of the castle, based largely on these accounts, see also J. Gifford, *Highlands and Islands* (Harmondsworth, 1992), 233–243, and M. Miers, *The Western Seaboard* (Edinburgh, 2006), 111–113. Castles constituted a significant part of the coverage of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS), *Inventories of Argyll* series. See especially RCAHMS, *Argyll 1 (Kintyre)*, 2 (*Lorn*), 3 (*Mull, Tiree, Coll and Northern Argyll*), 5 (*Islay, Jura & Colonsay*), and 7 (*Mid Argyll & Cowal, Medieval & later Monuments*). See also *Argyll Castles in the care of Historic Scotland, extracts from RCAHMS Inventories of Argyll, Vols 1, 2 and 7* (RCAHMS and Historic Scotland, Edinburgh, 1997), and a review article by J.E.A. Dawson, 'Argyll: the enduring heartland', *Scottish Historical Review*, vol. 74, 1 (April 1995), 88–94.
- 3 GUARD (Glasgow University Archaeological Research Division) Project 519, Castle Tioram, unpublished reports 1998–2000: 519.1 A Rutherford, 'The Documentary Evidence' (1998),



ILLUS. 12.1 *Castle Tioram, Loch Moidart; general view showing the eastern (right, in shadow) and southern (left, in sunlight) flanks of the 14th-century enclosure-wall crested by 16th- and 17th-century upperworks. The heightened original hall tower is to the right, and the original postern gateway, later blocked, lies just below and to the nearer side of it. Stretches of the curtain wall retain traces of the original crenelles (battlements) and of the holes which drained the parapet wall-walk.*

PHOTO: RICHARD ORAM

the castle's history and its built form and fabric, but, equally importantly, to re-examine the wider physical, cultural and environmental context of a key western seaboard castle associated with the MacDonalds of Clanranald, the longest enduring branch of the Lordship of the Isles. This essay presents a

519.2 K. Speller and G. Tompsett, 'Topographical and Archaeological Survey of Eilean Tioram' (1998), 519.3, D.A. McCullough and M. Taylor, 'An Underwater Survey at Castle Tioram, in Loch Moidart' (1998), 519.4, C. Evans and A. Rutherford, 'Building Analysis and Interpretation' (1998), 519.5, K. Speller, 'The Survey Products' (1998), 519.6, L.H. Johnstone, 'A Report on the Archaeological Resource' (1999), 519.7, A. Murray, S.T. Driscoll, B. Ballin Smith, 'Landscape around Castle Tioram: The Historical Evidence' (1999), 519.8, P G Johnson, 'The Geophysical Survey' (1999), and 519.9, K. Speller, 'Archaeological monitoring of emergency stabilisation works to the north-west curtain wall' (2000). Associated unpublished reports include A. Murray, 'Castle Tioram – The Historical Background' (1998), an especially valuable account, A.R.P. Lorimer and Associates, 'Castle Tioram, Statement of Cultural Significance' (1999), and D. Powell, 'Castle Tioram: Assessment of rock types used in construction – a geological perspective' (December, 1998).

summary digest of parts of that reappraisal, focusing, firstly and secondly, on the historical and architectural evidence relating to the castle itself and, thirdly, on its context.⁴

History

As with most other western seaboard castles, historical evidence relating directly or indirectly to the building, development and use of Castle Tioram is relatively sparse, and the documented history of the castle, particularly in its medieval phases, largely consists of a series of disconnected references and episodes.

The first specific mention of the castle of 'Elantyrin' occurs alongside that of Borge, Benbecula ('Uynvawle') in a charter issued by John MacDonald, first Lord of the Isles, to his son, Reginald or Ranald, at a date between 1346 and early 1373.⁵ In 1346, following the murder of her brother, John's first wife, Amy MacRuairi, whom John had married in 1337, inherited the lordship of Garmoran, of which Eilean Tioram formed part, and on 1 January 1372/3 John's charter received royal confirmation by King Robert II.⁶ The small island on which the castle was to be built had earlier been signalled as being of significance, for 'insula sicca' (dry island, that is, Eilean Tioram) was considered worthy of special mention in a charter of MacRuairi possessions issued by Amy's paternal aunt, Christina, probably in the 1320s, possibly slightly earlier.⁷

According to MacDonald tradition as recorded in the early seventeenth century, Amy MacRuairi 'built the castle of Borge in Benbecula and Castle Tirrim in Mudart',⁸ a statement which seems plausible but is almost impossible to

4 G. Stell, 'Castle Tioram: A Statement of Cultural Significance' (Edinburgh, 2006). The full, 119-page version of the report, which presented Castle Tioram within a wide review of the historiography of the western seaboard castles and of Castle Tioram's cultural, religious and artistic associations, is available in downloadable pdf format at <http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/index/news/indepth/castletioram/castletioram-documents.html>. There described as 'The Stell Report', it has been divided into four parts and subdivided further into seven documents, some of which incorporate blanked-out illustrations.

5 *ALI*, no 7.

6 *RMS*, i, no 520.

7 K. Speller, Castle Tioram: archaeological monitoring (*GUARD* 519.9, 2000). The original of Christina's charter is in the library of the Faculty of Procurators of Glasgow. For the circumstances surrounding its issue, see R.A. McDonald, *The Kingdom of the Isles: Scotland's Western Seaboard c.1100-c.1336* (East Linton, 1997), 189 and note, and S. Boardman, *The Campbells 1250-1513* (Edinburgh, 2006), 46-47 and note.

8 *HP*, i, 26.

validate. If true, it may narrow the beginning of building works at Tioram to a period between 1346 and 1350, given that Amy may have died by July 1350 when, lacking any associated evidence of annulment or divorce, her husband received papal dispensation to re-marry. Whatever the circumstances and whatever Amy's involvement may have been, the castle was certainly functioning by the 1380s. In about 1389, John's eldest surviving son by his first marriage to Amy, Ranald, progenitor of Clanranald or 'Sliocht Ragnail', is said to have died at his 'manor of castle Tioram', and in July of that year Ranald's brother, Godfrey, issued a charter from the castle.⁹ Ranald's son, Allan, is said to have died at Castle Tioram in 1419, while his grandson, also Allan, laird of Clanranald 1481-c.1503, is alleged to have imprisoned three Highland chiefs there at one time.¹⁰ Among these, Macleod of Harris is said to have been 'kept...prisoner for seven years at Castle Tirrim where he got his back broke which made him hunch backed all his lifetime'.¹¹

Though the lands of Moidart, including Castle Tioram, were among those claimed by the Crown following the forfeiture of the Lordship of the Isles in 1493, the family remained in possession of their lordship and from at least 1519 styled themselves 'Captains of Clanranald'.¹² John Moidartach, Captain of Clanranald 1530–40 and from 1542 until his death in 1584, remained for the most part a powerful thorn in the government's and neighbouring chieftains' sides throughout his long life, evidently withstanding a bombardment of Castle Tioram in 1554 at the hands of the Earl of Argyll.¹³

Compliance with the so-called 'Statutes of Iona' of 1609 and a bond of 1616 ushered in a new and more settled relationship between a number of West Highland chiefs, including Clanranald, and the royal government.¹⁴ The agreements placed constraints on Clanranald's customary lifestyle, however, particularly with regard to the use of only one birlinn (galley) of 16 or 18 oars and an annual consumption of wine restricted to one tun (252 gallons). By the terms of the 1616 bond, Clanranald's designated residence was 'Ylantyrin', but because he did not have a mains or home farm 'about his house', his mains which he undertook to 'labour with his awne goodis' was at Howbeg in South Uist.¹⁵ Part

9 ALI, 13, 287, 291; A. Macdonald and A. Macdonald, *The Clan Donald*, 3 vols (Inverness, 1895–1904), i, 506–507 and ii, 229; A. Cameron, 'Book of Clanranald' in A. MacBain and J. Kennedy (eds), *Reliquae Celticae*, ii (Inverness, 1892–4), 161, 167.

10 Macdonald and Macdonald, *Clan Donald*, ii, 245–246.

11 HP, i, 68–69.

12 Macdonald and Macdonald, *Clan Donald*, ii, 252–253; ALI, 289.

13 TA, x, pp xlvii, xlviii, 229, 287; Macdonald and Macdonald, *Clan Donald*, ii, 281–282.

14 G. Donaldson, *Scotland, James V–James VII* (Edinburgh, 1965), 230–231; Macdonald and Macdonald, *Clan Donald*, ii, 306–308.

15 RPC, 3rd series, x, 773–776; Macdonald and Macdonald, *Clan Donald*, ii, 317–318.

explanation of this unusual situation – and, incidentally, the earliest description of the actual appearance and setting of the castle – is provided by a topographical account which has been ascribed by the editor of the text to a date of around 1630.¹⁶ Here, Moidart is described as being ‘plenteous of milk and fishes, deir and roe but not fertill of corne... There is one castle in this countrie which is called Illandtirrein. And it is builded on a rock high above the sea and shippes doeth come to the castle and there is one high mountaine above the castle on the west and southsyde theroff’.

Royal favour had long assisted the territorial ambitions of the Campbell Earls of Argyll who, partly by agreeing in 1633 to pay off Clanranald’s growing burden of debt, came to assume feudal superiority over the mainland Clanranald estates.¹⁷ Over ten years later, however, in 1644 Clanranald elected to pursue a political and military course opposed to that of his feudal superior and in support of the Royalist cause led by James Graham, Marquess of Montrose, and Alasdair MacColla. MacColla was at Castle Tioram in 1644 and 1646,¹⁸ but the castle was eventually lost to the Parliamentary forces. It may have been captured by General Leslie in 1647, though a later source credits the Earl of Argyll with the reduction of ‘Castle Tyrim in Moydart, the last that held out for the King in those parts’.¹⁹ There is no evidence to show that the castle was garrisoned during the 1651–60 Cromwellian era.

The first surviving record of actual building work at the castle dates from 1668 when Donald, soon to become 13th Chief in 1670, was seeking deals cut from fir wood in Lochaber in order ‘to reparaire my old house of Castle Tyrholme’.²⁰ A delivery of slate nails in 1676 shows that he was then paying attention to the roof covering.²¹ This Donald, known as ‘Black Donald of the Cuckoo’ (the ‘cuckoo’ being his favourite gun), was in fact the last Captain of Clanranald to reside in Castle Tioram. On his death in 1685, his son, Allan, 14th Chief, remained in the Uists where he had lived from an early age with his tutor, Donald MacDonald of Benbecula.²²

16 MacFarlane, *Geographical*, iii, 167.

17 Macdonald and Macdonald, *Clan Donald*, ii, 322–325; F. Shaw, *The Northern and Western Islands of Scotland: Their Economy and Society in the Seventeenth Century* (Edinburgh, 1980), 44.

18 *Book of Clanranald*, 179–180; D. Stevenson, *Highland Warrior: Alasdair MacColla and the Civil Wars* (Edinburgh, 1994), 141.

19 Stevenson, *Highland Warrior*, 227, 240; *Memoirs of Lochell: Memoirs of Sir Ewen Cameron of Lochell* (Abbotsford Club, 1842), 84.

20 NAS, Airlie Muniments, GD16/34/197.

21 NAS, Macdonald of Clanranald Muniments, GD201/4/12.

22 P. Hopkins, *Glencoe and the end of the Highland War* (Edinburgh, 1986), 102, 116 and note 126 for evidence that Donald died in 1685 and not 1686; C. MacDonald, *Moidart, or*

Allan's defection in October 1692 to the court of James VII at St Germain, Paris, led to a detachment of the regiment based on Fort William being garrisoned in Castle Tioram.²³ In March 1693 the castle was ordered to be made 'watter and wind tight' and payment was to be made out of Clanranald's rents.²⁴ Though Allan made his peace with William's government in 1696–7, Castle Tioram remained in military occupation, its usual garrison consisting of a half company (a dozen or more men) under a lieutenant and a sergeant. In contrast to his MacDonald kinsman, Alexander of Glengarry, who made strenuous efforts to secure the return of Invergarry Castle,²⁵ Allan appears to have accepted the loss of Castle Tioram without demur, and at the beginning of the eighteenth century had set about the building of Ormiclate on South Uist as his chief residence.

Drawings of Castle Tioram and Eilean Donan Castle were among the products of a survey of military works in Scotland conducted by Brigadier Lewis Petit Des Etans (c.1665–1720), senior military engineer.²⁶ Undated, the drawings almost certainly arise from his first tour of inspection in 1714, and in the case of Tioram appear to show additions and alterations that were possibly intended to strengthen its defences. However, a report of July 1715 submitted by Sir Robert Pollock, governor of Fort William, cast a gloomy light on his outposts of Castle Tioram, Eilean Donan and Invergarry which must 'be repaired this seassone, for not only the windows bot even the roof and flours are ruined, ther having been no reparations made in any of them thesse fyve or six and tuintie years... And if there should be any truble in the cuntry, they are so farr from being of any use that wee shall certainly loose so many men and armes as is in them'.²⁷

Just over two months later his fears were realised, and in a report of 24 September 1715 his informant confirmed that Invergarry and its garrison had been taken and that 'the Captain of Clanronald had taken a detachment of twelve men and a serjeant under the command of Lieut. Gains of the said

Among the Clanranalds (Oban, 1889; new edition edited by J. Watts, Edinburgh, 1997), 87.

23 NAS, Privy Council Register: Acta, PC1/48, 474; Secretary of State's Letter Books, SP4/16 fo.160; W.J. Hardy (ed.), *Calendar of State Papers Domestic*, William III and I, iii, 1691–2 (London, 1901), 154, 539; Hopkins, *Glencoe*, 362.

24 NAS, Treasury Register, E7/7, 251, E7/8, 34.

25 Hopkins, *Glencoe*, 451, 467; NAS, Privy Council Register: Acta, PC 1/51, 590, 27 June 1699.

26 NLS, MSS 1645–1652, Z.3/25. For Petit at Eilean Donan Castle, see R. Miket and D.L. Roberts, *The Medieval Castles of Skye and Lochalsh* (Portree, 1990), 83–84.

27 NAS, Montrose Muniments, GD220/5/568/5.

[Lord Irwin's] regiment at Tyreholm Castle one of his own howses'.²⁸ According to local tradition, the Captain of Clanranald then authorised the firing of the castle, presumably in order to deny its further use by government troops.²⁹ The belief that the castle was burned on that occasion was recorded as early as 1733 in a note incorporated in a map of Loch Sunart published in that year, and was also referred to in a short report prepared for the Board of Ordnance in 1748.³⁰ The caption against Castle Tioram on the map of 1733 reads as follows: 'Anno 1715. The Kings troops in Garison in Castle Tyrim were surprizd by the late Capt. of Clanranald whose property it was and after disarming and dismissing them set the same on fire'.

On the other hand, one version of the abduction of Lady Grange, en route to exile on St Kilda in 1732, presents a lurid account of her short stay in Castle Tioram which, it is alleged, 'was still very entire' at that date.³¹ The fact that Petit's plans of this and other castles were copied in 1741 also suggests that they were still usable and that the government was considering their further rehabilitation as garrisoned outposts of Fort William. In the event, though evidently un-garrisoned, Castle Tioram stood close to the heart of the action in the first phase of the Jacobite Rebellion in July and August 1745, when Prince Charles Edward landed in Moidart, stayed at Kinlochmoidart and raised his standard at the head of Loch Shiel. During this stage of operations the castle is said to have been used by the Jacobites as a store for arms and ammunition,³² suggesting that it still then remained secure and to some degree weatherproof.

In the aftermath of the rebellion, Castle Tioram and Duart Castle on Mull were the objects of a composite drawing of 1748 by Paul Sandby for the Board of Ordnance.³³ A contemporary note on Tioram records that 'if this castle was repair'd it might accommodate a party of 50 men. The repairs would cost at least 800£s; the walls of the building being at present quite insufficient from the burning and injurys of the weather'.³⁴ Both Tioram and Duart

28 Ibid, GD220/5/568/17; HMC *Third Report* (London, 1872), Appendix, 308.

29 MacDonald, Moidart, or Among the Clanranalds, 92.

30 NLS, EMS.s.738 (15), Alexander Bruce Map of Sunart engraved by Richard Cooper in 1733.

31 K. MacLeay, *Historical Memoirs of Rob Roy and the Clan Macgregor, including original notices of Lady Grange* (Glasgow, 1818 and 1819), 384. For Lady Grange in exile on St Kilda, see G.P. Stell and M. Harman, *Buildings of St Kilda* (Edinburgh, 1988), 23, 33 (note 52) and 45–46 (No. 17).

32 P. Sked, *Glenfinnan* (Edinburgh, 1984).

33 NLS, MS 1652 Z3/28, partially reproduced in RCAHMS, *Argyll* 3, plate 54.

34 NLS, Board of Ordnance Plans, Z.3/28 g.

were clearly still being viewed as having potential military significance, and in 1749 Tioram became one of only four Scottish castles short-listed for conversion to barracks.³⁵ Of these, however, only Braemar and Corgarff on the route through the Eastern Highlands to the new Fort George at Ardersier went ahead.³⁶

In the later eighteenth century, other than a reference in a 1798 rental to a 'change house of Castle Tyrim',³⁷ the castle disappeared from record, and, following the break-up and sale of the family estates in the first half of the nineteenth century, Eilean Tioram, Castle Tioram and the island of Riska remained isolated and neglected Clanranald possessions. It fell to successive owners of the adjacent Lochshiel estate, builders and occupants of nearby Dorlin House, to care for the castle ruins in accordance with the standards of the time. Hope Scott, owner of the estate between 1856 and 1871, had the inner courtyard of the castle cleared of debris 'which filled the court to a depth of several feet' and which included a significant coin hoard of Spanish and silver dollars.³⁸ Work undertaken by the 2nd Baron Howard of Glossop in about 1888 is known to have included the infilling of breaches in the castle walls,³⁹ but it is clear from the surviving fabric that other consolidation operations were undertaken in the last decades of the nineteenth century, much of it apparently unrecorded.

In 1905 the Clanranald connection with the castle and island was finally severed when Tioram and Riska were purchased and attached to the Lochshiel estate. In 1926 Tioram island and castle were acquired by James Wiseman Macdonald who commissioned a survey and a programme of limited conservation work by the Ministry of Works, 'securing...wall tops, excavating and securing walls exposed in the courtyard and waterproofing the vaults. Only the very worst joints in the face work have been treated'.⁴⁰ Castle and island remained in the possession of the Wiseman Macdonald family until their acquisition by the Anta Group in 1997.

35 NA, Board of Ordnance, minute book, wo 47/34, ff. 198r, 199v (May 1749); wo 49/122 Board of Ordnance Estimate Book 1749–55, page 1. I am much indebted to Athol Murray for these and the following references.

36 NA, Board of Ordnance, minute book, wo 47/35, ff. 182v, 226v (March, April 1750); wo 47/36, ff. 54, 90v (July, August 1750).

37 C. Fraser-Mackintosh, *Antiquarian Notes* (Second Series) (Inverness, 1897), 255.

38 H.R. Mackenzie, 'Yachting and electioneering in the Hebrides', *The Celtic Magazine*, 11 (1886), 407–412 at 409–410; MacDonald, *Moidart or among the Clanranalds*, 25–26.

39 MacDonald, *Moidart or among the Clanranalds*, 23.

40 NAS, Ministry of Works, Ancient Monuments files, MW1/458; see also, Rutherford, 'Documentary Evidence' (GUARD 519.1, 1998), 20–22.

Built Form and Fabric

Though for the most part undocumented, these late nineteenth-century attempts at consolidation of the main wall surfaces are sufficiently obvious and crude to permit much of the form and fabric of the earlier architecture to shine through. Admittedly, there remain difficulties in detecting the extent of detailed alterations to openings, margins and wallheads, but as an exercise in building analysis Castle Tioram is not appreciably more difficult than others of its kind. However, from the few brief records of the castle clearance work undertaken in the nineteenth century, we can only guess at the extent of the considerable archaeological deposits that have been lost and are now, sadly, irretrievable.

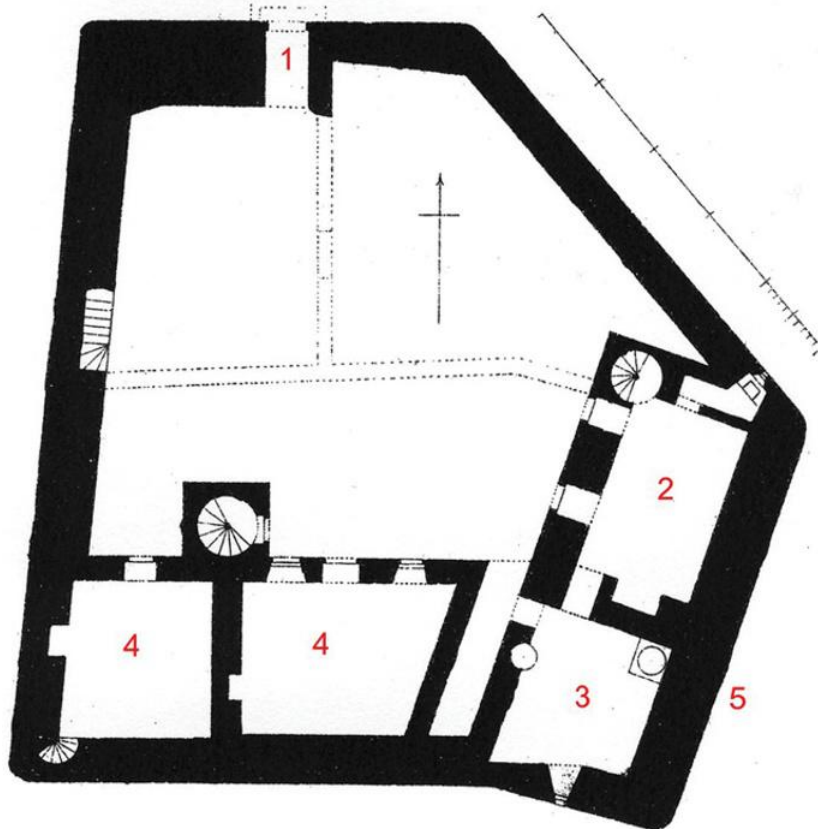
A substantial body of measured survey work compiled by GUARD since 1997 serves as a useful basis for understanding the castle's built form and fabric. The stone-by-stone survey coverage across the elevations is exemplary but the fresh large-scale layout and floor plans created as part of this exercise remain unpublished and have still to be used for the purposes of detailed building analysis;⁴¹ further investigations and additional survey data remain desirable in those critical areas where the hall tower adjoins the curtain wall. For some purposes, therefore, reference still has to be made to the small-scale plans which accompanied the surveys conducted by MacGibbon and Ross and by Simpson.⁴²

The recent thorough reviews of the historical source material are equally exemplary,⁴³ and the fact that the research was conducted and compiled independently of the physical survey has ensured that the results of each approach have been presented without prejudice to the other. However, especially given the relative paucity of material which bears directly on the history of the building fabric, there is a compelling case for drawing together these two major strands of evidence to see whether or not they provide a clearer and fuller picture of the castle's development, and in particular to see how far the suggested sequence of building and alteration may correspond with historical circumstances. This reporter finds little to disagree with in the outline sequence of the

41 Survey plans of four levels of the castle at 1:100 scale based upon data surveyed by GUARD and A.R.P. Lorimer and Associates for Anta Estates; the drawings are dated December 1998 and referenced 5439/05-08.

42 MacGibbon and Ross, *Castellated and Domestic Architecture*, iii, 56, Fig. 17, also reproduced in Gifford, *Highlands and Islands*, 233, and in Miers, *Western Seaboard*, 112; Simpson, 'Castle Tioram and Mingary Castle', 74, Fig. 2.

43 Rutherford, 'Documentary Evidence' (GUARD 519.1, 1998), and Murray, 'Castle Tioram, The Historical Background' (1998).



ILLUS. 12.2 *Castle Tioram, Loch Moidart; outline plan based on David MacGibbon and Thomas Ross, The Castellated and Domestic Architecture of Scotland, volume 3 (Edinburgh, 1889), page 56, showing principal diagnostic features:*

1. Entrance-gateway and irregular pentagonal enclosure wall; mid 14th century and later
2. Eastern range comprising a mid-14th-century hall, later vaulted and heightened into tower
3. Kitchen; 16th and 17th centuries
4. Southern tower and hall range; 16th and 17th centuries
5. Postern-gateway; mid 14th-century, later blocked

castle's building history originally presented by GUARD and essentially confirmed by Tom McNeill,⁴⁴ except with regard to the very earliest phase. The suggestion that the enclosure wall, simply by reason of its polygonal form and

44 T.E. McNeill, 'Tioram Castle: an account of its cultural significance' (Edinburgh, November 2004), <http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/index/news/indepth/castletioram/castletioram-documents.html>.

by comparison with others of this type, most notably Mingary, belongs to the thirteenth century and pre-dates any of the surviving structures contained within it is not convincing.

There are general flaws inherent in comparative typological dating of these kinds,⁴⁵ and Tioram, like the others, first needs to be scrutinised on its own terms. Here, the alignment of the enclosure wall along its south-eastern flank and the position of the gateway which served as the original main entrance or postern appear to respect the position and extent of the earliest standing internal building. Variouslly described as a 'keep' or 'tower house' in previous accounts,⁴⁶ this relatively modest structure appears originally to have risen to no more than two, possibly three, storeys. It is of a markedly horizontal design and in its elongated oblong proportions is closely akin to the halls and hall towers found elsewhere in the region from the thirteenth century onwards, most especially from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. What appears to have been an original gateway to the enclosure, either a main entrance or postern subsequently blocked up, lies immediately to the west of this hall tower, and at the opposite (eastern) end of the building, formed within the angled enclosure wall in a manner which strongly suggests primary work, are the remains of a couple of vaulted mural garderobes which served the hall block at first- and second-floor levels.

Taken together, the disposition and character of all these features in the enclosure wall suggest a relationship and functional integration with the hall tower, pointing to the reasonable probability that these adjacent stretches of enclosure wall were set out with the hall building in mind, if not as part of the same programme of building, a view that is reinforced by the fact that the walls of both hall and enclosure are also characterised by closely similar split-boulder masonry techniques. It is thus difficult to sustain the traditional, Simpson-derived argument which draws a clear distinction and century-wide gap between the dates of the enclosure and the rest of the castle. Unfortunately, the critical areas for detailed physical investigation at the junctions between the enclosure wall and the hall tower remain obscured but, subject to further investigations and findings in these areas, the balance of probabilities is otherwise weighted in favour of a much closer phasing between these two components. In other words, the first phases of Tioram as we see it today appear to coincide with the first documented appearance of the castle in the middle

45 See Stell, 'Castle Tioram', 15–19 and notes 16–43 for problems surrounding the classification and questionable dating criteria applied to 'thirteenth-century' western seaboard castles.

46 McNeill, 'Castle Tioram', 3.

decades of the fourteenth century, that is, at some date between 1346 and 1373. Deriving its layout and design from earlier forms of enclosure castle and 'hall houses', it thus appears to combine these two elements in a manner previously unrecognised. In the broad sweep of western seaboard castellar development such an 'enclosure hall' would stand, chronologically and typologically, midway between the classic thirteenth-century enclosure castles and the towers and barmkins of fifteenth-century and later date.⁴⁷

A careful reading of the architectural fabric reveals successive but largely undocumented phases of building development, particularly in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Within a sheltered enclosure which they heightened, successive members of the Clanranald family were evidently at pains to enlarge and improve their domestic accommodation, storage and services. Judging from the surviving remains, these appear to have included the creation of a second entire household and ample provision for the hosting of social gatherings in a second hall, features which faithfully reflect the enhanced status and lifestyle of a Gaelic lord and his kindred, but are rarely identifiable. Although there are few surviving diagnostic features which permit close dating, the documented repairs from c.1668 onwards appear to have been preceded by phases of alteration associated with John Moidartach in the 1530s and Sir Donald around 1610.

Among other major changes the heightening of the original hall tower evidently involved the creation and insertion of the existing masonry vault at its lowest level, a major and unusual structural undertaking, particularly in a region where unvaulted towers were the norm, or at least where they far outnumbered vaulted structures.⁴⁸ Other changes which appear to have taken place around the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries included the creation of turreted upperworks which incorporate crisply and decoratively carved corbelled angle-rounds. Of a quality and style which follow sixteenth-century Lowland conventions and of a sharpness which has successfully defied the elements over four centuries, these rounds are not quite of the quality of those at Carnasserie Castle, Mid Argyll, or Gylen Castle, Kerrera, but they are otherwise of an exceptional standard within this seaboard region.⁴⁹

47 As characterised in, for example, W. M. Mackenzie, *The Medieval Castle in Scotland* ((London, 1927), 36–72, 180–213, and J.G. Dunbar, *The Historic Architecture of Scotland* (London, 1966), 23–46.

48 J.G. Dunbar, 'Kisimul Castle, Isle of Barra', *Glasgow Archaeological Journal*, 5 (1978), 41–43; J Dunbar, 'The Medieval Architecture of the Scottish Highlands' in L. Maclean (ed.), *The Middle Ages in the Highlands* (Inverness, 1981), 53.

49 RCAHMS, *Argyll* 7, no 115; RCAHMS, *Argyll* 2, no 291.

Following seventeenth-century fashion, the main stair in the south range was re-located to better serve the more numerous public rooms and private chambers. The new stair was re-housed in a lofty, projecting turret which now survives as the most dominant single feature within the castle courtyard, and may well always have been calculated to impress visitors and guests. Of a type introduced elsewhere in the Highlands from the early seventeenth century onwards, the stair-tower is not in itself closely dateable, but if built in the second half of the century it is much more likely to have incorporated a scale-and-platt stair of the kind which remains at Invergarry. This stair-turret is more akin to that at Fairburn Tower, Easter Ross, which likewise once contained a turnpike or newel stair.⁵⁰

Though somewhat distorted by the nineteenth- and twentieth-century works of repair and consolidation, there are discernible alterations to the access, room arrangements and wall-head defences which point to a limited reorganisation of the layout in order to create barrack accommodation for government troops. Perhaps roughly attributable to the 1690s or early 1700s, this phase of occupation is hinted at, but not specifically referred to in the documentation of that period. But neither has any documentation yet been found for the north range within Mingary Castle, though this building, which probably dates from this same pre-1715 phase, undoubtedly was a barrack-block and in this case may have been Campbell-built.⁵¹ Invergarry Castle, principal residence of the MacDonalds of Glengarry, is certainly known to have been garrisoned then and later, and even in its dilapidated condition shows clear traces of adapted or additional barrack rooms reached from a lofty central turret housing a scale-and-platt stair, a general arrangement which bears a striking general resemblance to that at Tioram.⁵²

Finally, it is worth noting that close inspection of the fabric has confirmed that throughout the castle use has been made of sandstone dressings. In an area where sources of such stone are strictly limited, its occurrence provides useful tell-tale indicators to the organisation, logistics – and possibly phases – of the building industry which supported medieval castle- and church-building operations within this region.⁵³ The dressed stone appears to

50 MacGibbon and Ross, *Castellated and Domestic Architecture*, iii, 462–465; G. Stell, 'Architecture and Society in Easter Ross before 1707' in J.R. Baldwin (ed.), *Firthlands of Ross and Sutherland* (Edinburgh, 1986), 116–118.

51 RCAHMS, *Argyll* 3, no 345 at 215–217. See also the late seventeenth-century north-west range of courtyard buildings at Kilchurn Castle (RCAHMS, *Argyll* 2, no 293 at 236–240).

52 MacGibbon and Ross, *Castellated and Domestic Architecture*, iii, 620–622; Gifford, *Highlands and Islands*, 248–249.

53 Note, for example, the sites which may have made use made of the old quarries at Carsaig Bay, Mull, and Inninmore Bay, Morvern, noted under the entries in RCAHMS, *Argyll* 3,

be of two or three general types, and possibly sources. One type is a hard, close-grained brownish sandstone, from which some stair-treads and the corbelling and decorative detailing of the upperworks have been fashioned. Dating from around 1600 these dressings appear to have robustly weathered some four centuries of salt-laden winds and rain. In appearance and texture they are analogous with freestone that is likely to have been derived from Skye, Raasay or Scalpay, particularly from a small area around Broadford.⁵⁴ Another sandstone which appears among some high-level window, doorway and fireplace surrounds, out of reach of later depredations (though in some cases representing the results of later alterations), is of a yellowish colour and soft texture, in some cases very deeply eroded. Its source is uncertain, although it is not unlike the freestone used, for example, in Mingary Castle in Ardnamurchan, the provenance of which has been identified as Inninmore Quarry in Morvern.⁵⁵

In summary, the architecture of Castle Tioram presents one of the best, relatively untouched illustrations of a second generation of West Highland stone castles. Overall, it exhibits as well and as authentically as any within the region, architectural features which broadly conform to the national pattern of domestic and defensive building between the fourteenth and the eighteenth centuries. Architectural provision for a second household, including a second hall, are, however, relatively uncommon features and may be subtle but important pointers to distinctive social usage within the *Gàidhealtachd*.

Context

Facing seaward, effectively with its back to the Scottish mainland, on a tidal island with landing beaches and a well-sheltered boat anchorage nearby, Castle Tioram has a setting and location which was near-perfect for travel by galley or birlinn. Conversely, as was testified by the amount of engineering required in the 1860s to create a road along the banks of the River Shiel to

Nos. 380, 383. For a recent study of the geology of building stones in the Lordship of the Isles, see D.H. Caldwell and N. Ruckley, 'Domestic Architecture in the Lordship of the Isles' in R.D. Oram and G. Stell (eds), *Lordship and Architecture in Medieval and Renaissance Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2005), 96–121.

54 D. Powell, 'Castle Tioram: Assessment of rock types used in construction – a geological perspective' (December, 1998).

55 RCAHMS, *Argyll* 3, no 345 at 209.

Dorlin House,⁵⁶ the site has always had minimal natural advantages as far as overland communications have been concerned.

Its immediate surroundings, then as now, probably consisted predominantly of rough and rocky, tree-clad slopes which only gave way to more gentle terrain some miles to the south and east around present-day Acharacle and Kinlochmoidart. Evidence for management and use of the naturally abundant growth of timber in the area emerges only in the eighteenth century but there is no reason to doubt that full use of this resource was not also made in earlier times.⁵⁷ The castle also stood on the southernmost edge of mainland Clanranald territory adjacent to the estate boundary which was formed by the River Shiel, almost certainly then, as later, a rich source of fish stocks, particularly salmon.⁵⁸

However, contrasting with other major castles of the western seaboard such as Mingary in Ardnamurchan and Ardtornish in Morvern, Tioram evidently had no hinterland or demesne or 'table' land to speak of, and, unlike them, there is no hint of any church or village settlement nearby. Indeed, as Athol Murray has pointed out,⁵⁹ in the 1616 agreement with the Privy Council Castle Tioram was designated as Clanranald's principal residence but because he did not have a mains 'about his house' he was allowed to designate another on his estate which, by terms of the agreement, he would undertake to manage himself. His choice of mains, that is, demesne or home farm, at Howbeg and later Ormiclate on South Uist tells us much about the inter-island nature of the Clanranald lordship. An even more powerful word-picture of these maritime links is conjured up by a letter of May 1685, written in the immediate aftermath of the death of Donald, 13th Chief of Clanranald, the last to reside in Castle Tioram; the letter refers to the fact that all the laird's kin and kindred had gone to Uist 'to bury the corps of our maister the Captaine of Clanranald and are not as yet come back'.⁶⁰

56 NLS, MS 3688, diary entry for 5–6 September 1866, one of the diaries of James Robert Hope-Scott, 1859–70 (MSS 3681–92), cited in GUARD 519.7 Landscape report, 8.

57 The earliest references to the Moidart woodlands date from the eighteenth century; GUARD 519.7 Landscape report contains excerpts of entries from the Forfeited Estate Papers (1748) and Clanranald Muniments (1795–1815). See also H. Cheape, 'Woodlands on the Clanranald Estates, A Case Study' in T.C. Smout (ed), *Scotland since Prehistory, Natural Change and Human Impact* (Aberdeen, 1993), 50–63.

58 A salmon fishery is noted at the mouth of the River Shiel, just south of Castle Tioram, on the Alexander Bruce map of Sunart engraved in 1733, q.v. note 30 above.

59 Murray, 'Historical Background', 9–10; *RPC*, x, 773–776; Macdonald and Macdonald, *Clan Donald*, ii, 317–318.

60 John Stewart-Murray, 7th Duke of Atholl, *Chronicles of Atholl and Tullibardine Families* (Edinburgh, 1908), i, 235. I am indebted to Athol Murray for this reference.

Unusually, when judged by the Anglo-Norman patterns of castle, church and associated settlement, Castle Tioram may thus have always been a relatively isolated and unitary feature in the local landscape around Loch Moidart. But it was the sea and the seaways which constituted the castle's real physical context and hinterland, joining it to relatively far-flung places of residence, worship and burial which were closely associated with Clanranald. First emerging clearly in the MacRuairi lordship of Garmoran in the fourteenth century, this assemblage of disparate mainland and insular properties somewhat remarkably held together, more or less, for about four centuries as a water-borne family empire, a less extensive but much longer-lived version of the MacDonald Lordship of the Isles (c.1336-1493/1545) itself. Such lordships were relatively commonplace in the West Highlands and Islands, but very few were on this scale and none of them had a chief residence of a form or position comparable with Castle Tioram which was, in effect, the mainland station of an interconnected insular lordship.

The most convenient way of characterising the physical components of the lordship that was exercised from the castle is to provide a summary descriptive record of those sites that still possess significant surviving remains. Other secular residences associated with MacRuairi or Clanranald during the period of the castle's occupancy included **Borve Castle**, Benbecula, **Caisteal Bheagram**, Loch an Eilean, South Uist, **Ormclate Castle**, also on South Uist, and **Coroghon Castle**, Canna. Ecclesiastical sites that had varying degrees of association with the castle through MacRuairi or Clanranald patronage and usage include **Eilean Fhianain**, Loch Shiel, **Teampull na Trionaid** (Church of The Holy Trinity), Carinish, North Uist, **Teampull Bhuirgh**, Borve, Benbecula, and the complex of churches, chapels and carved stones at **Howmore**, South Uist.

Secular Residences

Borve Castle, Benbecula

This ruinous hall tower now stands in open and level grassland on the coastal plain behind the machair, close to modern houses and the remains of a World War II radar station. Its general physical form and context could scarcely be more different than those of Castle Tioram, but, appearances and setting notwithstanding, on historical grounds Borve Castle is quite unambiguously Castle Tioram's Hebridean sibling.

As the castle of 'Uynvawle', it first appears in historical record in the charter of John, Lord of the Isles, to his son, Ranald, between 1346 and 1372/3, the same document which makes first specific mention of Tioram, and the seventeenth-century 'History of the Macdonalds' attributes its building, like that of Tioram,



ILLUS. 12.3 *Borge Castle, Benbecula; general view of the ruinous 14th-century structure from the north-west showing the inner face of the principal building, a three-storeyed and double-skinned hall block. A gap, centre right, marks the position of the main entrance.*
WIKIMEDIA COMMONS, 2009

to Amy MacRuairi.⁶¹ Listed among the major strongholds of the western seaboard, it is identifiable in Fordun's account of c.1380 as the castle of 'Benwewyl'.⁶² The Ranald 'of Castleborf' on record in 1625 may have been Ranald, the younger brother of Angus and Sir Donald, 10th and 11th Chiefs of Clanranald, grandfather of Donald who became the 15th Chief in 1725.⁶³

The general settings around Loch Moidart and south-western Benbecula have probably always represented topographical extremes, but Borge's original site and architectural character may have been less of a complete contrast with Tioram than now appears to be the case. Largely as a result of the effects of blown sand which buried its associated church, this landscape is known to have changed dramatically since the sixteenth century. Early map evidence shows that the castle originally occupied a promontory site flanking a sea-inlet in a much-indented coastline, quite different from that of the present day.⁶⁴

61 *ALI*, no 7, p. 10–11; *HP*, i, 26. See above, notes 5 and 8.

62 *Chron Fordun*, i, 43.

63 *RCAHMS, Outer Hebrides, Skye and the Small Isles*, no 342, citing Macdonald and Macdonald, *Clan Donald*, iii, 346, 348, 370.

64 J.A. Raven, 'Medieval Landscapes and Lordship in South Uist' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 2005), 215–216, 342–351, and *NLS*, WD.3.B, Pont-Blau map of the Uists. Lochs in the vicinity of the castle are shown on William Johnson's Map of the Hebrides (National Library of Scotland, EMS.s.712 (24c)), published in 1823 and included in John Thomson's *Atlas of Scotland* (1832).

How much of the immediate surroundings of the castle have been disguised and regularised in the past few centuries is hard to say, but it seems likely that the main surviving structure would have been surrounded by some form of enclosure which has since been buried or removed.

Likewise, the layout and horizontal emphasis of Borge's hall tower design may not have been all that different from the slightly smaller but similarly proportioned hall-tower which constituted the earliest identifiable building at Castle Tioram. Of elongated rectangular plan, measuring some 18.2 by 10.1 metres over heavily mortared walls up to 2.7 metres in thickness, including an observable inner skin, Borge appears to have been of three main storeys and, like the original stone structure at Castle Tioram, was evidently unvaulted throughout.⁶⁵ Set within what appears to have been a small gatehouse, the main entrance, protected by a draw-bar, is near the centre of the south wall. Except for a window at the west end of the south wall there are few other visible features, and whilst different phases of work may be detectable in the fabric of the standing building, the overall physical development of the castle remains unclear.

Caisteal Bheagram, Loch an Eilean, South Uist

Standing within sight of the Howmore churches, which lie about a half-mile to the south, Caisteal Bheagram was a Clanranald property from at least the early sixteenth century, Ranald 5th Chief of Clanranald, being described as Ranald Alansoun of Ylan-Bagrim or Ylanebigorn in 1505 and 1508.⁶⁶ It is a small, two-storeyed tower which stands on a natural oval island, comparable in scale and setting with Dun Mhic Leoid, a late medieval island tower on the south-west side of Barra.⁶⁷

Caisteal Bheagram tower stands 3.8 m high and is oblong on plan, measuring 6.4 m in length by 5.3 m in breadth over walls 1.2 m thick.⁶⁸ The entrance is in the east wall, and in the north wall there are two narrow gun ports. In addition to the tower, the island, which measures some 84 m by 58 m transversely, contains the remains of no less than seven other buildings and a small garden.

65 MacGibbon and Ross, *Castellated and Domestic Architecture*, iii, 115–117; RCAHMS, *Outer Hebrides, Skye and the Small Isles*, no 342; N. Fojut, D. Pringle, B. Walker, *The ancient monuments of the Western Isles* (Edinburgh, 1994, revised 2003), 34–35; H.B. Millar, J. Kirkhope, 'Borge Castle, Benbecula' in Council for British Archaeology, Scottish Regional Group, *Discovery and Excavation Scotland* 1965, 20–21.

66 RMS, ii, no 2873; RSS, i, nos. 1662, 1690.

67 RCAHMS, *Outer Hebrides, Skye and the Small Isles*, no 440; Fojut, Pringle, Walker, *Western Isles*, 33.

68 RCAHMS, *Outer Hebrides, Skye and the Small Isles*, no 371; Fojut, Pringle, Walker, *Western Isles*, 33–34; J.A. Raven, M. Shelley, 'South Uist and Benbecula Duns' in Council for Scottish Archaeology, *Discovery and Excavation in Scotland*, new series, vol. 4 (2003), 136.

The footings of a well-preserved causeway lie to the south-east of the island, heading towards the shore of the loch.

Ormiclate Castle, South Uist

Probably the largest single structure of any kind erected on South Uist before the nineteenth century, this substantial laird's house of T-plan form was built between 1701 and 1707 for Allan MacDonald, 14th Chief of Clanranald, serving as a commodious residence and new estate centre on the open farmlands of Ormiclate.⁶⁹ Of two main storeys and an attic in height, it is a big building of its type, even by Scottish mainland standards, the sub-divided main block measuring some 21 by 7.6 metres overall. The house faces north onto a courtyard which is enclosed on the west by an earlier range containing a large kitchen fireplace. Over what used to be the doorway there is a panel bearing a Clanranald armorial, the charges being similar to those on the Clanranald stone from Howmore where they are reversed. The walling is of harled rubble masonry with freestone dressings from an unidentified source outside the Uists.

Now surviving merely as a ruinous shell, Ormiclate evidently had only a relatively short period of occupation. Persistent tradition states that it was accidentally burned in 1715, roughly coincidental with the firing of Tioram, but the episode is undocumented. Whilst it is known to have been in use in 1716,⁷⁰ there is little indication of occupation or rebuilding thereafter, its builder having died of wounds sustained at the Battle of Sheriffmuir in November 1715 and his successors remaining in exile at that time. After the forfeiture, Allan's widow, Penelope, despite remaining an active Jacobite, was allowed to retain Ormiclate and the South Uist estate as her jointure; the other Clanranald properties, including Castle Tioram, fell to the feudal superior, the Duke of Argyll.⁷¹

Coroghon Castle, Canna

Eyrie-like, this rectangular two-storeyed structure occupies the top of the precipitous rock stack of Coroghon Mor on the south-east coast of Canna, the

69 RCAHMS, *Outer Hebrides, Skye and the Small Isles*, no 370. For the tradition of the burning, see Macdonald and Macdonald, *Clan Donald*, i, 344; T. Addyman 'Ormiclate Castle', and A. Badcock, J. Symonds, 'Ormiclate Castle' in Council for Scottish Archaeology, *Discovery and Excavation in Scotland*, new series, 1 (2000), 99.

70 A letter from Ranald MacDonald, 15th Chief of Clanranald, to the Earl of Mar is dated 11 April 1716 from Ormiclate, which was later used as a staging post by other Jacobites escaping to France (F H B Daniell (ed), *Calendar of the Stuart Papers belonging to His Majesty the King*, ii (London, 1904), 107–114, 148–149, 408).

71 Information supplied by Athol Murray, to whom I am also indebted for the references cited in note 70 above.

only building on the island which could – even very approximately – be classed as a castle.⁷² Although Canna was a possession of Iona Abbey, the Clanranald family had an association with the island from the sixteenth century, and from 1628 under the superiority of the Argyll Campbells.⁷³ The castle is likely to have been a Clanranald structure, and the tradition that it was used as a prison by a jealous husband to confine his wife has long been plausibly linked with Donald MacDonald, 13th Chief of Clanranald and his treatment of his second wife Marion MacLeod.⁷⁴ ‘Black Donald of the Cuckoo’, as he was known (the ‘cuckoo’ (‘cuthag’) being his gun), was closely associated with Canna, receiving a charter of the island from the earl of Argyll in 1672. He died there in 1685.⁷⁵

Rubble-built and, like Caisteal Dubh nan Cliar in Ardnamurchan,⁷⁶ partly utilising natural rock-faces, the building is entered from the landward by a wooden-lintelled doorway with draw-bar socket giving access to an ante-chamber from which a rock-cut internal stair leads to the upper floor. There are two main rooms on the upper floor, one of which has been sub-divided; the other, larger room is lit by five windows and has a cellar beneath, also lit by two windows. The crag was referred to as a ‘refuge’ in a description of c.1593, a term which might well embrace a building of this kind.⁷⁷ As depicted in 1772 the castle was roofless but still standing to some height.⁷⁸ There are no visible earlier remains on the crag but a recent survey concluded that ‘given the presence of other forts and duns on the island, it is inconceivable that this impregnable position was not fortified at an earlier date’.⁷⁹

Ecclesiastical Sites

Eilean Fhianain, Loch Shiel

The ruinous remains of the church which served the medieval parish within which Castle Tioram stood occupies a site close to the western edge of the

72 RCAHMS, *Outer Hebrides, Skye and the Small Isles*, no 680; RCAHMS Broadsheet 5, *Canna, The Archaeology of a Hebridean Landscape* (Edinburgh, 1999).

73 J.L. Campbell, *Canna, The Story of a Hebridean Island* (Oxford, 1984 and later editions), 63–73.

74 Ibid, 74–85, discussing the account in MacDonald, *Moidart, or Among the Clanranalds*, 68–81.

75 Ibid. 83–85; Athol Murray has established that Donald died in 1685 not, as usually stated, 1686 (Stewart-Murray, *Chronicles of Atholl and Tullibardine Families*, i, 235, 253; NAS, Clanranald Muniments, GD201/1/147).

76 RCAHMS, *Argyll* 3, no 336.

77 W.F. Skene, *Celtic Scotland: A History of Ancient Alban*, 2nd edition (Edinburgh, 1886–90), iii, 434.

78 T. Pennant, *A Tour in Scotland and Voyage to the Hebrides* (Chester 1774 and 1776, reprinted in one volume and edited by C.W.J. Withers, Edinburgh, 1998), plate 32, opposite 274.

79 RCAHMS Canmore database, site NG20NE 4; RCAHMS report by ARG dated 21 August, 1996.

summit area of this steep-sided and distinctively 'green' island in the middle of Loch Shiel. The church is of elongated rectangular plan, measuring some 21 metres in length by about 6.5 metres in width overall.⁸⁰ It retains few closely dateable features but in its existing form it probably belongs to the fifteenth or early sixteenth centuries, and there are at least three sculptured late medieval monuments of distinctive West Highland type on the island, two lying within the ruins of the church.⁸¹ At the eastern end of the church are the remains of an altar table which has obviously been reconstructed in relatively modern times but in an earlier un-reconstructed form such a feature, as at Oronsay Priory, Argyll,⁸² is likely to have been used by the Irish Franciscan missionaries in the third and fourth decades of the seventeenth century.

Tangible confirmation of the close association of this medieval island church and burial-place on Loch Shiel with Clanranald and Castle Tioram is provided by an inscribed monumental slab at Ardchattan Priory, Lorn, which may be ascribed to a period between 1515 and 1545 and which commemorates Ruairi, parson of Eilean Fhianain and half-brother of John Moidartach, 8th Chief of Clanranald.⁸³

Over six miles south-east of Castle Tioram as the crow flies, the island takes its name from one of the saints bearing the Irish name, Finan, and a grave-marker, a cruciform stone and a cast bronze bell testify to its Early Christian origins.⁸⁴ It has remained in use into modern times as a burial-place by both the Protestant and Catholic communities of Sunart and Moidart respectively, and the overland 'coffin' route between the castle and the loch shore near the island is evidently flanked at intervals by marker cairns in groups of twos and threes, totalling about 40 altogether.

80 I.B. Cowan, *The Parishes of Medieval Scotland* (Scottish Record Society, 1967), 60–61, s.n. 'Elanfinan'. A copy of a plan of the church based on a survey of 24 August 1974 by Iain Thornber is lodged in RCAHMS, IND/183/1.

81 Copies of photographic survey by Iain Thornber in RCAHMS. See also K.A. Steer and J.W.M. Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture in the West Highlands* (Edinburgh, 1977), 2–3 and map (site no. 47).

82 RCAHMS, Argyll 5, no 386 (altar table described and illustrated 238 and 238A); see also 254 and notes 39 and 40.

83 RCAHMS, Argyll 2, no 217 (funerary monument 12, p. 112); see also Steer and Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture*, inscription no 61 (pp. 136–137).

84 I. Fisher, *Early Medieval Sculpture in the West Highlands and Islands* (RCAHMS and Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, Monograph series 1, Edinburgh, 2001), No. 15 (pp. 85–86, 161).



ILLUS. 12.4 Sketch map of the western seaboard showing sites associated with the MacDonalds of Clanranald:

1. Teampull na Trionaid, Carinish, North Uist (NGR, NF 816603)
2. Borge Castle, Benbecula (NF 773505)
3. Teampull Bhuirgh, Borge, Benbecula (NF 769503)
4. Caisteal Bheagram, Loch an Eilean, South Uist (NF 761371)
5. Churches, chapels and carved stones, Howmore, South Uist (NF 758365)
6. Ormiclate Castle, South Uist (NF 740318)
7. Coroghon Castle, Canna (NG 280055)
8. Castle Tìoram, Loch Moidart (NM 662724)
9. Eilean Fhianain, Loch Shiel (NM 752683)

Teampull na Trionaid (Church of The Holy Trinity), Carinish,
North Uist

The earliest records associated with this relatively large medieval church point to a connection with the MacRuairi family, though there is nothing to indicate a continuing association with the Clanranalds. In the early fourteenth century the church, together with, among other assets, 'the whole land of Carinish', was granted to Inchaffray Abbey (Perthshire) by Christina MacRuairi, aunt of Amy MacRuairi, a grant which was confirmed by Amy's son, Godfrey, in 1389, and by Godfrey's half-brother, Donald, Lord of the Isles, in 1410.⁸⁵ By the Reformation, the connection with Inchaffray no longer obtained and the church was included in a list of lands belonging to the abbot of Iona.⁸⁶ By 1575 it was being held of the bishop of the Isles by James MacDonald of Sleat, and on the occasion of a raiding party of MacLeods from Harris in 1601 local people used the church precincts 'as in a santuarie'.⁸⁷

The main body of the church, which measures some 19.8 by 6.6 metres overall, survives as a fairly substantial ruin standing up to 6 metres in height and incorporating numerous putlog-holes or slots for timber beams used in its construction.⁸⁸ It is likely to be of fourteenth-century origin but shows evidence of later alterations and additions. In a position on the north side of the church and linked to it by a vaulted passage is a small oblong gabled structure of sixteenth-century date which appears to have originally served a domestic purpose, probably a priest's house, rather than a sacristy. Later known as Teampull Clann a' Bhiocair (Chapel of the MacVicars), it came to be used as a family burial-place in post-Reformation times.

Teampull Bhuirgh, Borge, Benbecula

Buried within a large sand dune on the coastal machair over 500 metres south-west of Borge Castle are the ruinous remains of a church of rectangular plan which measures internally some 14 metres in length by 5 metres in width within mortared rubble walls.⁸⁹ Its name indicates a close association with

85 *Inchaffray Chrs*, nos. cxlii-cxliii (142–143); *ALI*, nos 10, 18 (pp. 13–14, 28–29). The 1389 charter was issued at Castle Tioram.

86 RCAHMS, *Outer Hebrides, Skye and the Small Isles*, no 160, citing *Collectanea de Rebus Albanicis* (Iona Club, 1847), 52. It evidently never achieved parochial status, becoming part of the medieval parish of Benbecula (Cowan, *Parishes*, 203–204).

87 *Ibid*, citing *Collectanea de Rebus Albanicis*, 10, and Sir Robert Gordon, *A Genealogical History of the Earldom of Sutherland* (Edinburgh, 1813), 244.

88 Fojut, Pringle, Walker, *Western Isles*, 43–44.

89 RCAHMS, *Outer Hebrides, Skye and the Small Isles*, no 341.

fourteenth-century Borge Castle, with which it was probably contemporary. However, the ruin retains no closely dateable features and there are no visible traces of burials in and around the church, though pottery fragments found in abundance on the lower slopes of the dune point to the former existence of a settlement of uncertain date, possibly medieval or prehistoric.⁹⁰

Churches, Chapels and Carved Stones, Howmore, South Uist

Long recognised as the most significant ecclesiastical complex on South Uist, the surviving remains at Howmore consist of the fragmentary ruins of two medieval churches (Teampull Moire and Teampull Chaluim Chille, also referred to as Caibéal Dhiarmaid) and the remains of two detached chapels (Caibéal Dhubhgaill and Caibéal Chlann 'Ic Ailean), while a third chapel (Caibéal na Sagairt) is said to have been removed between 1855 and 1866.⁹¹ The churches and chapels stand on slightly elevated ground which at one time would have formed an island in a rolling and marshy landscape, and they are associated with a walled burial ground and two burial-enclosures of nineteenth-century creation, one of which may be a rebuild of the missing third chapel.

The parish of Howmore, which first comes on record in the fourteenth century, became a parsonage dependent on the abbey of Iona.⁹² It is not certain when it became the recognised burial place of the chiefs of Clanranald. A graveslab of late medieval type that was in the burial-ground in 1866 may conceivably have been associated with the family but it no longer survives.⁹³ The first Clanranald burial on record here was that of John Moidartach who bequeathed funds to build a chapel at Howmore where he was buried in 1574.⁹⁴

The fragmentary ruins of the two larger structures, Teampull Moire (which was evidently the medieval parish church of South Uist and measures over 20 metres in length by about 8 metres in width) and Teampull Chaluim Chille, preserve evidence of windows of thirteenth-century or later character. The two chapels are of oblong plan and the easternmost, at 5.3 by 3.2 metres the slightly smaller of the two, has been identified as the Caibéal Chlann 'Ic Ailean

90 RCAHMS Canmore database, site NF75SE 13; report by Historic Scotland dated June 1992.

91 RCAHMS, *Outer Hebrides, Skye and the Small Isles*, no 367; Fojut, Pringle, Walker, *Western Isles*, no 8, pp. 41–42.

92 Cowan, *Parishes*, 83.

93 T.S. Muir, *Ecclesiological Notes on some of the Islands of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1885), 51.

94 Fojut, Pringle, Walker, *Western Isles*, 42. See also Fisher, *Early Medieval Sculpture*, no 43, p. 108.

(Clanranald's Chapel), built with the bequest from John Moidartach. Fragments of moulded stone surrounds, including one bearing crisp, well-preserved and possibly revival dogtooth carving, are lying loose in the chapel which until recently also contained a triangular-headed armorial panel commemorating a prominent member of the Clanranald family.

Having been stolen from the chapel in 1990 and recovered from London in 1995,⁹⁵ this stone is now housed for safe-keeping in the Kildonan Museum, South Uist. Known as Clach Chlann 'Ic Ailean (The Clanranald Stone), it is a triangular-headed armorial panel of late sixteenth- or early seventeenth-century character and bears in relief the arms of Clanranald: dexter base, a lymphad (galley) with rudder, central mast and sail set; above this, a hand coupé bearing a wheel cross; sinister base, a castle, and above it a lion rampant; centre and surmounting the whole is a bird on a thistle slip, that is, in heraldic parlance, a representation of a thistle 'slipped' or torn from its root or stock. The source of the yellowish-coloured sandstone from which it has been carved has evidently not been geologically identified.

A cross-marked slab in the ruins of Teampull Chaluim Chille points to an Early Christian origin for the complex as a whole, while recent investigation of the standing remains of the churches and chapels has suggested that, with the exception of Caibeal Dhubhgaill, they have all undergone two or more phases of structural development, possibly going back to a period earlier than the thirteenth century.⁹⁶

* * *

Cutting across most modern notions of travel and communication, these are the main sites which make up the historical and geographical hinterland of Castle Tioram and which, taken together, present a fuller and more rounded appreciation of the castle's place in successive MacRuairi and Clanranald lordships. From Loch Shiel in the east, through Moidart and the Small Isles to South Uist and Benbecula in the west, fragmentary and elusive as these remains are in some cases, collectively, in their island and highland settings, these sites have an extraordinary power as fixed points in a lifestyle based on maritime mobility. Their geographical dispersion contrasts markedly with other, more nucleated forms of medieval lordship found elsewhere, even in the West Highlands. Yet this maritime network retained remarkable cultural cohesion

95 N. Fojut, 'Howmore: Romancing the Stone', *Current Archaeology*, 152 (April, 1997), 308–309. For revival dogtooth ornament in a sixteenth-century West Highland context, note the doorway surround of Dunderave Castle (RCAHMS, *Argyll* 7, no 126, pp. 267–269.

over at least 350 years from about 1350 to the early eighteenth century. Except for the MacDonald Lordship of the Isles and the subsequent Campbell hegemony, few lordships of the western seaboard region could match the extent, variety and longevity of the Clanranald empire.

96 A. Reynolds, M. Hamilton, J.A. Raven, 'Howmore Ecclesiastical Complex' in Council for Scottish Archaeology, *Discovery and Excavation in Scotland*, new series, vol. 5 (2004), 139–140.

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